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the 1990s, the incidence of *S. pneumoniae* meningitis in children has increased in many countries [10].

There are a number of reasons why the incidence of meningitis due to *S. pneumoniae* may have increased in children. First, the incidence of pneumococcal carriage in children has increased in many countries [11]. Second, the incidence of pneumococcal carriage in children has increased in many countries [12]. Third, the incidence of pneumococcal carriage in children has increased in many countries [13].

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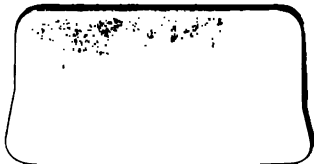
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# WON!

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“JENNIE, OF ‘THE PRINCE’S.’”

“Anfangs wollt ich fast verzagen—  
Und ich glaubt ich trüg es nie—  
Und ich hab es doch getragen  
Aber fragt mich nur nicht wie!”

Seine.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,  
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.  
1877.

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CONTENTS  
OF  
THE SECOND VOLUME.

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CHAP.		Page
I.	Un nommé Delroy . . . .	1
II.	Lotta rises in general Estimation . . . .	23
III.	At Hastings still . . . .	37
IV.	Baffled, but not Disarmed . . . .	48
V.	Finesse . . . .	68
VI.	Dora instructs the Solicitor . . . .	82
VII.	The First Stone . . . .	90
VIII.	The Solicitor makes a Move . . . .	103
IX.	The Lily Lady . . . .	113
X.	At Teak and Brine's . . . .	123
XI.	Mr. Stock, " Our Foreman." . . . .	134
XII.	Questions . . . .	144
XIII.	Sibyl's Début at Fern-Lea . . . .	155
XIV.	Brown Beauty . . . .	168



CHAP.	Page
XV. Sibyl lays a Train . . . . .	184
XVI. In Lime-Walk . . . . .	199
XVII. The Charmer Charmed . . . . .	212
XVIII. Sibyl has her Way . . . . .	228
XIX. "Sold." . . . .	240
XX. Blandishments . . . . .	256
XXI. Carlton's new Leaf . . . . .	269
XXII. Another Legal Tentative . . . . .	282
XXIII. Mothers and Daughters . . . . .	291



# W O N !



## CHAPTER I.

UN NOMMÉ DELBOY.

“ Paris, April 15.

“ **I** HAVE finished the picture for the Duc d'Astraël, and much wish to come to my dear old Proff for rest and peace and perfect quiet of mind and body.

“ Wilt thou bear with me in this hermit mood of mine? It is new to me, and will, I fear, irritate thee, thou most eager and restless of men, ever devising—more, ever carrying out—some novel scheme for

the arousing, stimulating, or nourishing that small flame intellect, which in thee burns grand and bright, but in thy neighbour's children, alas, how sluggishly!

“If thou wilt let me come to thee, best of all Proffs, at once, for a little time, I should be thankful and glad. Scold me, call me lazy and other bad names; only—and this I humbly implore—ask me no questions. I have ‘Heimweh,’ and it draws me to thee, my most tried, much valued ever true old friend.”

So wrote Claud Morel. And Professor Reich wiped his spectacles as he finished reading his dear boy's letter, for the quick tears of sympathy stood in his keen black eyes.

“Jettchen” (*Anglicè*, Hetty), cried the Professor, and touched a hand-bell.

In answer, his wife immediately appeared on the threshold, and stood waiting her master's orders.

“Jettchen,” said he, “I do not doubt by Sunday our Claud will be here. Perhaps, just for once, to please me he will sleep in our guest chamber. Prepare all of the best. He likes your Pökelfleisch,

you know, and Leberwurst for supper. The day he arrives give him a hare, well larded, Jettchen, and plenty of cream in the gravy. If you do well, we will open a bottle of champagne, and you also shall drink to the health and success of our dear Claud."

Jettchen, wearing her short woollen skirt and big white cap as heretofore, entered heart and soul into a lengthy discussion on the style of feeding most calculated to please "our Claud," of whose tastes, as regarded meat and drink, she had a wonderfully distinct recollection. This was a proof of Frau Reich's motherly affection for her husband's favourite "boy."

"It is really astonishing how good and how useful a woman may be made to be, if she is properly trained and kept in her place," mused the Professor, as he pondered on the excellent qualities of the wife who had just taken her orders from him. She knew no greater delight than to carry them out in loving obedience and minutest detail. She revelled in the prospect of a "lot of cooking" in the coming

week, by which she could prove how sincerely she honoured that great and clever man, her husband, and also Claud, his favourite friend and hers. For Claud was courteous, gentle and considerate, to the Frau Professorin, and treated her with a deference to which she was quite unaccustomed.

Although it was late in April when Claud returned to Hamburg, the peat fire was still indispensable, and with it the tightly closed doors and hermetically-sealed windows characteristic of the "Gänsegasse." Poor Claud was in a very despondent frame of mind, and felt really anxious to make up by present devotion for his seemingly ungracious neglect of the Professor during the past winter; therefore he consented to the pressing invitation and occupied the "guest-chamber." But though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. To remain in so unhealthy an atmosphere was impossible. He felt stifled and sick, and longed to shift his quarters to some well-ventilated hotel; and yet he was at a loss how to make such change without hurting the feelings of both the Professor and his wife. And for that humble honest soul the artist had a strong

feeling of affection and respect, and was as little inclined to wound her keen sense of hospitality as that of her despotic lord and master.

All things are said to come to him who waits, and without over-much waiting the chance of deliverance came to Morel.

Strolling idly along the Jungfernstieg one afternoon he was suddenly stopped by a long-bearded, large-eyed Frenchman, who, calling out, "Ah ! mais sacré nom de —Voilà, voilà, c'est mon bien cher Morel !" shook his hands with an amount of effusion startling even from a Parisian, unless he be your own familiar friend.

Friends, or chums rather, Morel and Delroy had never been ; but once—how many years ago ?—fellow-students in Paris,—art students *bien entendu*,—frequenting the same galleries, drawing from the same models, studying at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and going to other haunts of a less reputable character.

"Ah, mon bien cher Morel," cried Delroy, "but you see me here a very *misérable* ! Ah, but, my dear !—word of honour, it is *positivement* true ! Here

am I in this land *terrible* of scheks and sookrous" (by way of explanation Delroy spluttered and made atrocious grimaces), "and I cannot bring myself to speak one single word of it. Ah, how it is *ennuyeux*! Indeed it would make fear to—"

"My good friend," said Morel, interrupting him in French, "pray do not trouble yourself to talk English to me. I have not forgotten your language, I assure you. Indeed I have just come from Paris."

"Ah, you have come from Paris! you, who are not compelled, perhaps, as am I, you have chosen to leave our belle France, our women so *chic*, our men who have *esprit*, to come into this land, where the human species resemble only cows and hippopotami!"

"Quite true; but I came here because I am fond of the place and some of the people in it. I want rest and change. Both are to be found here—at least *I* think so. Our views are evidently as dissimilar as in the Paris days of old."

"Ah, but those fine days of delight! That was life! That was the true pleasure! We have, hélas! had to change all that.

We are—I say it with profound regret—no longer quite as young as we were then; and we have lived—lived so much since, have we not, my dear?”

“There is certainly no disputing the fact that we are both older and, it is to be hoped, steadier than we were ten years ago,” said Morel.

“As for you, who have the type of five-and-twenty in your form and colour, you have the look of one with the cares of fifty upon you. You are sad; ah, but why are you so sad, *mon Dieu*? What has happened to you, say? But I can say it for you. It is this horrible climate, Morel, and the sight of these great coarse women. They have pretty complexions and fine eyes, but—*après*? Not one grain of *chic* in their composition. They are heavy, solid. Can you find me one with half the taste, or the *esprit*, possessed by the commonest Parisienne who presides over a kiosque on the Boulevards? No, I defy you! And that is enough to give the blues to the gayest man that ever lived, if he has any eyes in his head.”



“What, in the name of wonder, brings you to a place you detest so cordially?” asked Morel, laughing again at the other’s vehemence.

They were now walking along side by side, furtively regarded by the ladies taking their afternoon promenade along the Alster. The striking beauty of the fair man, and the forcible gesticulation of the dark one—foreigners both—naturally caused some emotion in the quiet bosoms of discreet Hamburg maidens.

“You ask me what brings me here? It is a whim of my old patron’s,” said Delroy, in answer to Morel’s question. “You may remember him—Sir ’Ardbank ’Ardly,” (aspirates are almost impossible to French tongues), “an old Englishman, and of an *originalité* and eccentric, *voyez-vous!* Oh, it is something incredible the whims of these rich Sirs. This one came to this place last summer and met a lady, a Hamburg lady—*figurez-vous?*—who suits his taste, and to please her and himself with recollections of their courtship—she is twenty and he is sixty; it must have been very touching—he has

resolved to decorate his dining-room with sketches of all these places with impossible names." And here Delroy produced a written list from his pocket, and made a vain endeavour to read "Uhlenhorst," "Blankenese," "Stintfang," &c.; which euphonious sounds were not improved by his method of pronunciation. "If I had refused to paint these pictures for Sir 'Ardly, the commission would go to some brother genius, perhaps far less in need of a few thousand francs than I am. And so, *me voici*. He pays well, that *original*. Now having found you, I am as a drowning man saved. I implore you, my good Morel, have pity on me. For the sake of our ancient affection—why, we were like brothers—let me share your apartments, or, better still, come and live at my hotel. It is not too bad, and the prices moderate. I do not speak one word of their jaw-breaking language, as you perceive. Say will you, for the sake of those good old times?"

Morel had no recollection of the amazing affection and brotherly love that Delroy quoted so touchingly; but he felt

strongly that this forsaken foreigner might prove a case for compassion, *in re* the Professor, and that Morel could with so laudable an object remove from the Gänsegasse.

“I will think of it,” said he, “and will let you know to-morrow. Where are you staying?”

“At the ‘St. Petersburg.’ And it is good enough and not too dear. My one chance of conversation is with a Swiss waiter there—”

At this moment Morel stopped short and raised his hat, while he smiled a pleased recognition. The young lady who answered it, with a very lowly bend of her head, blushed vividly, so vividly that the bright colour mounted from her neck to her brow, and her blue eyes filled with sudden tears.

The young lady was Lotta Steinmann, and Lina, laughing and delighted, stopped beside her, and gazed straight up into Morel’s pleased face.

“This is, indeed, a welcome sight,” cried he, and took both the girls’ hands in his.

Whereupon Lina held up her lips for a

kiss. Lotta was silent; but Lina cried, "Where have you been all this long time? and why, O, why, did you not come to see our Christmas tree?"

Then Lotta, recovering her composure, said,

"It is indeed long since we had the pleasure of seeing you, Mr. Morel. When did you return to Hamburg?"

She spoke with a pretty tremble of lips and voice, that made even the "jaw-breaking" German sound musical to the attentive ears of Delroy. He was gazing and listening as in the manner of certain not too refined Frenchmen when attracted by women — more especially if the woman be an *ingénue*, of which class Lotta was an ideal specimen.

"I have only been back a week," said Morel, in an apologetic tone, "and I have paid no visits as yet, and seen no one but my good old Professor, with whom I am staying at present. Indeed this is almost my first walk. I consider myself so fortunate in having met you, my dear Fräulein. Ten minutes ago I ran against another acquaintance. You I might have

hoped to see, but *he* was the very last man I should have expected to meet in Hamburg. Allow me to introduce an old fellow-student, Louis Delroy, to Mademoiselle Steinmann."

"I am sure Mademoiselle, who has a look full of intelligence, speaks French, and so will make me a happy man," remarked Monsieur, never taking those boldly admiring eyes of his from the girl's face.

Lotta, though a susceptible, was by no means an over-sensitive, girl. Admiration in itself was pleasing to her, and she rather courted than shrank from it. She had often heard that Frenchmen are noted for their gallantry and devotion towards the fair sex. So she took Delroy's glance as flattering homage to her fresh fair face, of the prettiness of which she was quite aware. With a ready smile she answered him, speaking in his mother tongue fluently, though not without accent.

Of course he at once remarked that she must have lived in Paris. Nowhere else could such facility have been acquired. All of which naturally gratified the girl.

They were all four walking together. Lina had clasped Morel's arm with both hands, and insisted on monopolising his attention. They had now reached the Aussen Alster, and saw before them the burly figure of the Herr Senator.

"There is papa; come to him at once. How glad he will be!" cried Lina, running on, and pulling Morel with her.

Herr Steinmann was pleased and surprised to see the artist. Any little feeling of vexation at that abrupt departure in the winter was forgotten in this unexpected meeting.

"But Paris has not agreed with you, my friend," remarked the Senator; "you look fagged, and not at all so laughing as before."

"I am well," said Morel, changing colour in a way that told of broken rest and shaken nerves; "but confess to feeling overworked. Truly I have had almost too busy a time. And so I have come to my old Proff's to rest."

"Hardly the most peaceful abode for a tired soul that shuns controversy, is it?" asked the Senator, with his odd smile. "I

have a painful recollection of a visit I once paid him about Christmas time."

Lotta, her attentive cavalier beside her, came up at this moment, and Morel anxious to escape from further Christmas allusions, at once introduced Delroy. The Senator welcomed the Frenchman with that true cordiality that distinguished this kindly old Teuton, who was a cosmopolitan in his views, and held to the laudable creed that "there's good to be found in every man," no matter what his nation or persuasion; and he at once, with his ready hospitality, prayed both the artists to come home and dine with him.

"Four is our hour," he said, "and the Frau Senatorin will be proud and happy to make you both welcome. Indeed she will be quite delighted to see our good Morel once again."

Claud declared that he was expected in the Gänsegasse and must not fail.

Delroy evidently longed to accept the hearty invitation, but felt he ought not to go without his friend. The Senator at once understood the difficulty.

"Ceremony between men of the world

is absolute nonsense," said he. "If you will honour us by accepting us without ceremony, Monsieur Delroy, nothing could be kinder."

"Pray go, Delroy; you will find yourself in clover, I assure you," said Morel, laughing at the other's hesitation. "And to-morrow morning I will come and let you know about the hotel."

"And you really will not join us to-day, Mr. Morel?" asked Lotta, looking wistfully into his eyes. They seemed to her so sad now; surely they always used to laugh even before his lips moved.

"Impossible, my dear Fräulein. But in a day or two, with your good father's permission, I will come and look at the drawings. I hope you have been industrious and made great progress?"

"You must come and see for yourself; and please come very soon, will you?" she said, and gave him her hand and another wistful look that somehow touched him for the first time.

"*Au revoir!*" said he kindly; and "*Au revoir!*" cried the others. So they parted, Claud going back alone to the Pro-




fessor's warm home in the Gänsegasse.

\* \* \* \* \*

“And how did you fare at our hospitable friend's dinner yesterday?” asked Morel, as he came into Delroy's room next morning.

“Fare, my friend? My ideas are being completely *bouleversés*! These Germans in their own homes are quite a different people, and a pleasant people too! That little Lotta, with her Pomona face and her blue eyes, is positively piquante, and as fresh and sweet as milk and honey. She has tolerable feet too, and her hands, though somewhat plump, are decidedly pretty. And what naïveté! Ah, Dieu! but it is too charming. As for you, my young Adonis, she adores you, and she shows it just as clear as the sun shines. Were it not that such conduct would be an ungenerous return for your amiable introduction, I would make love to her myself. She already likes me; she finds my attention flattering; and, as you must know, these little affairs of the heart have never much difficulty for me. My capability for affection is very great,



and I have few scruples in showing the state of my feeling when once it is aroused."

"No doubt, Delroy; and, believe me, I have no wish to check your superabundant emotion," Morel answered, laughing; and then, in a graver tone, said, "As for any imaginary claim I may have on the young lady's affection, you are utterly mistaken. There is between us simply such an *entente cordiale* as must subsist between master and pupil who like working together. I had the pleasure of assisting Mademoiselle Steinmann with her drawings last winter. If you are taking this matter seriously, if you really like this young lady, I would advise you to behave yourself discreetly, and in due course ask the consent of the Herr Papa. She will have a handsome *dot*, and that will be no drawback to you, I know. Your wild oats must surely be sown by this time, and it would not be a bad plan for you to settle down to matrimonial bliss. As for the young girl herself, she is very charming, really, and I know she inclines to artists."

“Yes, *pardieu!* There was a fellow who came in last night, quite *l’ami de la maison*, and sweet on the little partridge too; one Bahn, a sculptor. But the small nose of Mademoiselle went heavenwards; she evidently preferred my pretty French compliments to the heavy platitudes of the German carver.”

“Bahn is a worthy fellow, and a good friend of mine,” said Morel.

“Is he?” asked the other, with that national shrug of the shoulders that says so much. “I should hardly have thought that. His face turned as black as a thundercloud when little Lotta, blushing, said, ‘You will be glad to hear our *bon ami*, Monsieur Morel, has returned.’ They all spoke French the whole evening, so I lost nothing of what was said.”

“Ah, poor Bahn scowled, did he? I know he can look very black if he likes. Is it possible that he can be jealous—of me? Well, we certainly do not see ourselves as others see us”

“I long to see you installed here and near to me, my good friend,” said Delroy, after a pause; “to me it is a great pleasure

to see your Adonis head, whatever it may be to jealous Bahn and others. By the by are you busy to-day?"

"No, my friend; and you do not seem to be too much occupied either," Morel said, looking at Delroy with an amused air.

The Frenchman was stretched full length on a sofa, smoking placidly. He wore a gorgeous dressing-gown, and the shabbiest of worsted-work slippers; and had put a bright silk handkerchief with knotted corners, cap-like, upon his shining black hair. Occasionally, by way of refreshment, he sipped the *petit verre* of absinthe that stood by his side, and the scent of that nauseous green liqueur pervaded the room, mingling not pleasantly with the stale smell of yesterday's cigars, to which a fuller flavour was given by those under immediate consumption.

"No; not much occupied at present, as you say," answered Delroy, yawning audibly; "but my business will commence now you have come. I am going to Steinmann's at once, to take the view of the Uhlenhorst which one gets from their

turret-window. And I undertook to bring you with me. You will come, won't you?"

"Impossible. I do not wish to go."

"If you do not *wish* to go, of course a little difficulty arises; but surely nothing is impossible. I see very plainly that, for some reason which I do not in the least understand, you do not desire to visit that house. No doubt I could discover the why and wherefore by a few judicious questions asked of that plump and guileless little Lotta. Shall I ask her? You shake your head in a most melancholy fashion. This begins to intrigue me. What can it all be about? Lotta evidently makes no impression on you; then there is only the old mother, and *après—*" Delroy paused, puffed out a cloud of smoke, and added, "I have it: it is that English lady, the governess, of course!"

"An English lady there now?" cried Morel, the blood rushing hotly to his face.

"*Ma foi!* but yes," laughed the other; and looking across at Claud, he actually started up from the sofa, exclaiming,

“No, it cannot be possible, really, that *she, that mees*, troubles your peace!”

“Don’t play the fool, Delroy,” cried Morel angrily; “say what you mean. Do you wish me to understand—”

“That the lady is by no means attractive? To me, certainly not! But, then, ‘chacun à son goût;’ and further, ‘tous les goûts sont dans la nature.’ Both very true. Is it possible that yours is what in your own tongue I have heard you describe as ‘fat, fair, and fo-o-o-rty?’”

“Of whom are you talking? Don’t speak in riddles, Delroy,” Morel cried, fully betraying emotion he was no longer able to suppress.

Delroy raised himself on his elbow. He had previously sunk back again into the sofa-cushions. Looking his visitor straight in the face, he said,

“I make no riddles. I speak of an ancient English girl—very respectable, no doubt—by name Mees Full, or Full-ar, or Pullar, who has forty years, more rather than less.”

“Ah, I see my folly now,” said Claud,

with a gasp that with a woman would have been a sob; "it is worse than folly. I am not master of myself when I think of the woman I have lost. Delroy, if you have a grain of good feeling in your heart, I conjure you never to allude to this—this weakness of mine again; never, and to no one. Give me your hand on that, and command my faithful service in your turn."

"*Parole d'honneur*, and on the faith of a gentleman," said Delroy, quite as solemn now as Claud himself. He was really impressed by the other's pained look and earnest manner. It is a special faculty with Frenchmen not only to adapt themselves to your mood, but actually to feel with you for the moment.





## CHAPTER II.

### LOTTA RISES IN GENERAL ESTIMATION.



ABOUT two o'clock the artists set forth together. It was a delicious spring day. Fleecy cloudlets were carried gaily along by a mild west wind; the sun smiled on all nature and on the handiwork of man. Trees began to put forth small green feelers timidly, sparrows merrily twittered, and occasionally a more melodious note from the full throat of a rejoicing thrush or blackbird smote deliciously on appreciative ears.

All the town seemed to be astir. The dinner-hour was over, and the boys and



girls were trudging back to afternoon school. They all carried knapsacks on their backs, containing books, slate, pen, and pencils, and these gave a somewhat military appearance to the young folks.

On the Alster, miniature steamers were plying actively from the inner to the outer water. Along the broad paths by the water-side, bordered by trees rich in promise of future leaves, ladies on visiting and shopping bent began to wander townwards.

“Upon my word, Morel, it’s quite too late to-day to do any good in the way of sketching, isn’t it?” Delroy said lazily. “I should get well scolded by that pouting Hebe, I know, if I were coming alone, and so much behind time. But bringing you with me, I am quite sure of a hearty welcome, and am really much obliged to you for condescending to come. I shall take a further privilege of friendship on myself by telling Mlle. Lotta that you have kept *me* waiting, and that excuse will absolve me from blame at once. You must be aware that you can do no wrong in her eyes.”

---

“ Really, Delroy,” said Morel, in a vexed tone, “ this is carrying a joke too far. The girl thinks less of me than—”

“ Ah,” cried Delroy, interrupting, “ let us hope she may soon think less of you than of me, my friend. To that I cordially agree.”

“ Delroy, do you know I really begin to feel that I am wrong in encouraging a wild hawk like you to enter so peaceful a dovecot at all.”

“ No, truly; oh no, my good friend, no! For I assure you I have gone into many and many in my time, but come out scathless!”

“ And how about the doves!”

“ Ah, the dear little doves! They are so pretty, and if they are truly good and innocent they will get no harm from me. It is only the tricky and deceitful devils in women’s too attractive form whom I should never spare—no, by heaven, never! As for the good little girls, the little modest maidens—*ma foi!*—I am no villain, I am not treacherous.”

Lotta, looking charming in her fresh

linen gown, came fluttering down to the outer gate to greet the artists.

“How very late you are?” she cried; “but there is still just time. Come with me at once to the turret-chamber. There is a fine light there, and I have put all in the best order for you. Mamma and Lina are out; only Miss Fullar is at home, and she likes drawing very much indeed. However, I would not permit her to go up into ‘the Atelier.’ I have prepared *that*, and only for you two. I will show you the way, and see you have all you want; and then no one shall disturb you at your work.”

She was mounting the stairs as she spoke, and too much occupied with the importance of all the arrangements she had made for the comfort of her artist-guests to heed them specially. Had it been otherwise, she could not have failed to perceive Claud’s wistful glances as he passed by the rooms so tenderly associated in his mind with the sweet tenant who had left them to go into a home of her own far away.

But bright Lotta’s spirit of enterprise

was rousing and contagious, and inspired even Morel. As for lazy Delroy, within ten minutes he had actually settled himself down to make a study. And then Claud, almost instinctively, followed the good example of swift work before him, and, taking a pencil from Lotta's hand, began absently to trace the outline of the picturesque Uhlenhorst.

So it happened that an ordinary young woman (and Lotta had nothing heroic about her), by dint of an honest purpose, carried the day, and the strength of her energetic will set two indolent men to work, who had lazily resolved to do nothing but smoke and dine before they went to bed that night.

Until half-past four the light was good, and the effects of the shadows deepening in the distance made work easier. Lotta was earnestly entreated to remain in the "studio," but there were household matters requiring her attention during her mother's absence, so the girl said. She had a modest feeling about being "in the way" in that sky parlour. That her rosy face and snowy gown could only add

to the pleasure of the desultory work and chat going on up there never occurred to simple little Lotta.

When the Herr Senator came home, he went straight to the improvised "Atelier."

Delroy was enthusiastic as to the fine point of view, and thanked his host with effusion for having given him "this magnificent opportunity of doing good work."

"And now I will be off at once," he added; "I have just to put things together, but that will not interfere with you, gentlemen. Pray go to your dinner, and I will steal out of the house quietly, and disturb no one."

"You will do nothing of the sort, *mon ami*," said Steinmann, laughing. "I have to thank you already for assisting me to polish up my rusty French. It will be quite fluent again after a few more lessons from you. Of course, you will remain and dine, and you will correct me every time I make a mistake, won't you?"

To this mutual-obligation proposal

Delroy assented, with many complimentary speeches.

Morel, the moment the Senator proposed the adjournment from the impromptu studio, became consciously, painfully silent. It was impossible to him to go into the rooms below without feeling oppressed by crowding recollections of that ideal Marguerite, with her love-lit eyes and soft gray gown, whom to forget had been his constant striving for the last few months of his life. He had thrown himself, as he believed, heart and soul into his work. The subject was congenial, the models excellent, as French models mostly are, their intelligence being far superior to that of the English men or women who act as lay figures. During this enforced stay in Paris, Claud had risen at six, and commenced painting at eight, concentrating his attention with all his will-power on the canvas and the models before him. During these busy hours, his head had kept moderately clear—free for the time, that is, from the ever-haunting eyes and the softly

echoing voice of sweet Pearl—that Pearl whom even to think of now had become a crime ; Pearl who, alas, had given herself gladly, willingly, to another. But, the palette laid aside, all striving was vain. Neither the society of other artists, the brilliant talk in the *salons* of distinguished ladies such as Paris justly boasts of, nor the attraction of the Opéra or the Comédie Française, drove from poor Claud's mind the haunting image of the only girl he had ever met, with whom he believed he could have passed his life in perfect happiness. He felt so sure of Pearl, knew that from her he would have had the comfort of constant sympathy, cheering companionship, genial help in his work, and that he could have staked his soul on her honour and her perfect good faith in all things, if—Oh, that fatal if !

Now to move through the familiar rooms at Steinmann's, and again to meet the faces associated in his mind with his lost love, was a sore trial. He scarcely knew how he should pass through this ordeal outwardly unmoved. He had resolved to avoid entering those hospitable

doors at all, during his stay in Hamburg this time; but circumstances were too strong for him, and he, as was his nature, had yielded too easily to their bent and to the will of others.

Claud commenced his trial in earnest when he entered the dining-room and met his hostess's outstretched hands and cordial greeting. He knew the colour was dying out of his face, and could not keep his eyes from the place Pearl used to occupy; he felt as if she must be there once again, just for this one hour at least. And when he looked, he felt the chill glance of Miss Fullar, "fat, fair, and forty;" possessing all the characteristics (bar the want of flesh) typical of that most proper and conventional of human beings, the English spinster, who talks eloquently on the wickedness of man, and "would not think of marrying, Oh no, my dear, not for worlds."

For Delroy, Miss Fullar's bow and glance were two degrees less frigid. He had been *introduced* on the previous day; and at the shrine of the proprieties Miss Fullar respectfully worshipped. The sud-



den revulsion of feeling caused by the sight of this lady in Miss Gray's place affected Morel almost hysterically (the true artist has always much of his mother's tender nature); for, without in the least intending it, he laughed aloud. Fortunately Lina was by his side, and Lina had just puffed out her cheeks and reduced her mouth to "prunes and prism," in emulation of Miss Fullar, whom Lina held in contempt. All those assembled at table, save the lady imitated, had seen Miss Lina's performance, and to it Morel's boisterous laughter was ascribed. Frau Steinmann touched his arm, and whispered,

"I entreat you not to encourage the child; she is too naughty, and will actually think her absurdity commendable if you laugh at it."

On which Claud at once drew himself up with unwonted sternness. Yet all the while his spirit was sinking within him. He wondered vaguely how he should endure that dinner-hour, and how he could ever have allowed Delroy to bring him back to the only house in Hamburg

he had determined to avoid. Claud in his way was as far from heroic as Lotta in hers; but Claud was a man of genius, keenly susceptible to outward influences, and feeling deeply where he felt at all; whereas Lotta was only a plucky good-tempered girl, possessed of some talent, much mother-wit, an affectionate disposition, vigorous health, and nerves that troubled her not at all.

Together these two would probably prove a well-assorted couple, and with a bonny light-hearted wife like Lotta, Claud might settle down to an easy life of home-comfort, doing such mediocre work as mostly results from commonplace surroundings and the even tenor of uneventful domesticity.

Strange to say that on this very day, while his heart was aching for the loss of Pearl, Claud for the first time thought of a marriage with Lotta as among the possibilities of the future. He had never before so thoroughly realised how much he had once hoped and expected from that future, at a time when he was daily seeing Pearl and allowing himself to look

upon her as his wife, or how blank and valueless life itself had become to him since he had lost her. Of how little consequence was what he did or what he left undone now! If it were really true that the good little girl opposite cared for him, would it not be kind on his part to endeavour to make *her* happy? He might strive to be as good a husband to her as she surely deserved, and he felt convinced that she would prove a good wife to him if only he gave her the opportunity.

\* \* \* \* \*

That night ideas of this kind came soothingly to poor Claud's restless mind. That was a happy family circle of Steinmann's, and no right-minded man could regret entering it as a cherished member. It seemed quite a haven of rest to a heart-broken wearied man of the world as Claud at this time considered himself. And to win the affection of a fresh, honest, good girl like Lotta was surely a pleasing prospect.

Lotta's bright face, her smiling blue eyes, and yellow hair seemed to look upon him out of the darkness. He fancied

himself taking her by the hand, and those plump little fingers clinging around his ; but gradually the round rosy face changed to a more refined oval, the eyes that had laughed now had a depth of tenderness in them, and were steady and gray. The fingers that seemed to clasp his were slighter and had a strange power that thrilled his nerves, just as the lightest touch of Pearl's hand had done whenever by happy chance it had lain in his.

“ Mr. Morel, will you kindly help me here ? I am in trouble . . . . ”

Good God ! It was her very voice, just what she had said to him many and many a time in those blessed hours when she had worked with him. Then she had looked up for his help with a little pitiful glance all her own, that had sorely tempted him, there and then, to kiss her eyes and her lips too, and beg—how earnestly!—to be allowed to help her always, always.

He was dreaming, and he roused himself with a start, sprang from his bed, drank a tumbler of water, took himself to task for indulging in idle fancies, and

resolved to put them aside for the future, and to prove his manhood by conquering what was now worse than folly. Indeed this very night he, for the first time, determined to take a serious step in the matter of that good affectionate little Lotta, and made up his mind ere long to offer himself to the Senator as a candidate for his daughter's hand.

With this honest purpose he fell into a sound sleep, from which Pearl's gentle voice roused him again, after a while:

“Will you kindly help me? I am in trouble . . . .”






## CHAPTER III.

AT HASTINGS STILL.

“ Warrior Square, April 20, Friday.

“  Y darling wife,—I know you will feel disappointed when you receive this letter, because I have to tell you that I cannot return to-morrow, and so you will have to spend a whole Sunday without me. Very terrible to you, little woman, and I don't half like it myself; but I am making way with this inflexible mother of ours, and I feel sure that you will be glad to know that.

“ The fact is I have met a former acquaintance here, a Mrs. Moreton, and

she is much interested in you and in what I have told her of your little adopted sister. Mrs. M. appears to me thoroughly to understand children, indeed she devotes her time to their education, and thinks we need have no anxiety about Dora's nervousness and shyness, as the child is sure to grow out of all that. Mrs. M. is convinced that if we could resolve to let her have the care of Dora for a year, and give the child the opportunity of constantly associating with girls who would be kind to her, she would soon become sociable and lose her painful timidity.

“ You will be pleased to learn that *I* have actually made all these paternal inquiries on account of our little *protégée*. Think over Mrs. Moreton's suggestion, will you? I consider it a good one.

“ As to my mother, Mrs. M. knows all about our difficulties there, and sympathises with us. It appears that Sibyl Moreton, her daughter, who is a very superior person also, has some influence with Lady Caroline. Now if you and this Miss Moreton became acquainted, she

might bring about a better feeling towards you on our mother's part. I am of course declared to be prejudiced in your favour, and that is not very wonderful, is it, my Pearl?

“We will talk over all this on Monday, when I shall be home again. You may expect me before luncheon. How much there will be to tell my little wife after this long absence! Will she be sorry to have ‘the master’ back again? Kisses on paper are not much worth having. All the same, consider yourself kissed by  
“YOUR LOVING HUSBAND.”

Pearl read and re-read this letter, and for the first time since she had known Hubert she felt at a loss as to what really had been the thought in his mind while he was writing. As he himself would have been quite unable to explain the various motives that had dictated that letter, it was not surprising that his wife was puzzled by it; nor was it astonishing that tears blinded her eyes when she realised that her husband



would be away from her two days longer than she had anticipated.


Mr. Carlton had seen Mrs. Moreton each day, and had held long and confidential conversations with her. She had a quietly sympathetic manner, eminently soothing to a man of Carlton's temperament, who liked all things to be brought about without much effort on his own part. The very first time they were closeted in that boudoir, where we have seen tea and advice administered to the pupils, Mrs. Moreton obtained a full and particular account of Carlton's courtship from him. He told her of his wife's charming qualities, dwelt on the happiness of his married life, and confessed that only one trouble clouded the horizon—Lady Caroline's cold displeasure. This, he said, made Mrs. Carlton unhappy, and for her sake he was most anxious to bring about a more friendly feeling.

"You know Lady Caroline by this time, I am sure," said Hubert, looking troubled; "and you, I think, will understand that she is a difficult person to deal


with. Can you advise me in this matter?"

Mrs. Moreton saw that this anxiety on his wife's account had really become a burden on the young man's shoulders. She felt "*so sorry*" for him, she said, and then declared herself ready to assist him in every possible way.

"You are naturally prejudiced where your wife is concerned, dear Mr. Carlton," she said; "at least others would think so, though I do not, for I thoroughly understand your feelings and appreciate them. From all you have told me about Mrs. Carlton, I feel convinced that your dear mother is labouring under most erroneous impressions. She hinted to me that you had married one wholly undeserving the honour of your name and position. It occurs to me that the right way to undeceive Lady Caroline on this point would be to enable some mutual friend to speak to her on this matter, with the impartial conviction of personal knowledge; some one who would be able to judge your wife kindly and fairly, and who would understand the purity and simplicity of which you have



so touchingly spoken to me." Here Mrs. Moreton paused, saw by Carlton's grateful look that she had touched the right chord, and then continued impressively: "I only wish it might be in my power to render you this little service; it would be so easily, so gladly done. But I am tied, as you know. My duties, pleasant as they are, are arbitrary. No one can take my place with my dear girls. They look to me in all things. It has occurred to me to invite Mrs. Carlton here, if she would not mind coming into a school, that is to say—" and here Mrs. Moreton paused, anxious that Carlton should appreciate her humility, which he did by a deprecating glance and movement. "This plan would hardly be feasible, though," the widow continued; "for Lady Caroline might at once become aware of concerted action on our part, and thus we should be defeated at the very outset. So some other way must be found; some happy thought will surely occur to you or me. Will you consider the matter from my point of view, and will you believe that I shall



be only too delighted to give you any assistance I possibly can?"

For all this kindness Carlton thanked Mrs. Moreton with unaffected gratitude. Sibyl did not appear during this first interview, but Carlton was too much occupied in pondering on the words of wisdom he had heard, and the friendly interest shown to him by the plausible mamma, to think about the daughter.

Carlton rose to depart. "I am very sorry you cannot stay to see Sibyl," said Mrs. Moreton; "she will so regret having missed you; but she is particularly engaged with a somewhat refractory pupil. Dear Sibyl has the most wonderful influence, when she chooses to exert it, on every one. I cannot blame so attractive a girl for not caring to devote herself to the regular schoolroom drudgery. On special occasions she is ever ready to help me; and I think it is always well for mothers to remember that they were young themselves *once!*"

"A fact, Mrs. Moreton, you only require your looking-glass to remind you of."

At this gallant speech Mrs. Moreton smiled her approval.

“Pray remember me kindly to Miss Sibyl,” said Carlton, “and tell her I hope to hear that she has reduced the refractory kitten to a proper state of subjection and discipline. Talking of cats, it might be well to suggest to your daughter that, if that fierce brute McKenzie could be put through some taming process, it would be advantageous for all who come in contact with him.”

“Ah, poor man, I cannot help pitying him,” said the widow, with a deprecating smile. “He really is so desperately in love with Sibyl, he sometimes seems to lose his head.”

“His temper undoubtedly,” replied Carlton, laughing, and, having made his final bow, he went away.

Sibyl, ever watchful where her interest was concerned, had seen Carlton arrive, had wondered at the length of his visit, and now at last saw him depart. She was seated by her window, which looked seawards, and she was discreetly hidden by a lowered venetian blind. Perhaps

the refractory pupil (?) was represented by swarthy Gabriel, who had taken up his position opposite Glenville House, and made a poor pretence at appearing as one of the ordinary loungers by the shore. His sudden starts, his clenched fists, and his furious fashion of commencing to smoke, then flinging away the cigarette just lighted, were scarcely compatible with the calm gazing at sea and sky, and the placid inhaling of saline breezes, characteristic of the usual seaside stroller. McKenzie had taken up that commanding position at an early hour, had watched Carlton's arrival, and had ever since so clearly shown his mental perturbation, that Sibyl found quite a pleasure in watching him from her coign of vantage. She even smiled as she saw him, livid with ill-suppressed passion, cross the road as soon as Carlton was out of sight. Then she heard him ring the bell below violently, and glided down to instruct the maid who had to answer it.

"I wish to see Mrs. Moreton on particular business," said the Major, giving his card to the servant, who, after some

delay, opened the door in answer to his summons.

"She is engaged with the young ladies at present, Sir," said the maid.

"I don't mind that," answered he promptly; "in fact—that is—I mean I should prefer to see—to give my message to *Miss* Moreton. She is at home, I know."

"I think not, Sir; but I may be wrong. Perhaps she has come in since. Will you step in, Sir, and write a note?"

"Certainly; or I can wait. I don't mind waiting any time. Is *Miss* Moreton really out? Come now, Susan, you're a pretty girl, and I am sure you're as good as you're pretty. Tell me the truth. She has been in all the morning, hasn't she?"

The Major was so agitated that he actually stammered over his inquiries, and insinuated a potent silver argument into "Susan's" hand with fingers that trembled.

"Of course I tell the truth, Sir," said the girl, with a fine display of indignation. "My name is not Susan, Sir; it is Jane. Thank you, Sir. This way, if you please,

and I'll go at once and see for you, Sir. I'll tell mistress as how you don't mind waiting a bit."

It may be inferred that Miss Moreton's whispered instructions to Jane, the "dark gentleman's" agitation, and the sudden gift of the half-crown provided ample food for conversation and comment in the regions below—below the parlour at Glenville House, of course.







## CHAPTER IV.

BAFFLED, BUT NOT DISARMED.



THE Major found himself in an elegantly-furnished drawing-room. Crimson velvet and elaborate gilding predominated. A log-fire blazed in the steel grate, a valuable china bowl stood on the centre table, and costly nick-nacks, most of them of oriental origin, lay about on velvet-covered stands.

On the walls hung portraits in crayon of Mrs. Moreton, of a young lady, and of a hideous old man. The young lady on the wall at once arrested McKenzie's attention, because she resembled Sibyl.

It was the picture of Sibyl's sister, "*who had married so well,*" and who had caused her widowed mother no anxiety when Surgeon-major Moreton's death necessitated the ladies' return from India to England.

There was some resemblance between the features and contour of the young lady's head and those of Sibyl, but a startling difference in the complexion (the sister had bright pink cheeks) and in the defiant glance of those bold dark eyes that looked straight at the Major from out of the oval frame. Were Sibyl's eyes dark too? They were certainly not round or bold like her sister's. No; Sibyl's fringed lids surely veiled something beautiful, and she dropped them at pleasure, to hide the thoughts on which she desired no one should intrude. Thus argued Gabriel.

On a table lay a photographic album. McKenzie began hurriedly to turn over the leaves. Perhaps he might here find what he was burning with impatience to behold again—the face of his charmer; and as he found it, she entered quietly, wearing her hat and gloves.

"I have just returned," she said; "I have been shopping. How are you this morning? You did not seem in good spirits last night!"

He answered her, but not intelligibly; he was fighting against an irresistible temptation to utter words which he felt to be unwarrantable. The inclination soon proved stronger than his power of resistance, and in a suspicious tone he said,

"Do you mean to tell me that you have not been entertaining that fellow Carlton? Why, he has been here for the last two hours! That you can't deny." He spoke in a tone of suppressed passion that disagreeably thickened his voice, and made her involuntarily move farther away from him with ill-concealed aversion.

At this moment Mrs. Moreton entered, smiling with her usual urbanity.

"Has Mr. Carlton really been with you this morning, mamma?" asked Sibyl. "Major McKenzie has just given me this interesting information."

"Yes, my child; he has but now left me, and very much regretted your absence.

I am so pleased to welcome you beneath my humble roof, Major McKenzie."

"Surely Mr. Carlton might have waited for me," said Sibyl. "I too am sorry to have missed him. I wish I had decided to go out this afternoon instead of in the morning." She moved away to the window and lifted the muslin-curtain.

"How charmed Carlton would be to hear you say that Miss Moreton!" cried the Major, in a tone meant to be sarcastic. "Pray command my services. Shall I go after the truant knight, and tell him his lady desires his return?"

"My dear Major, how amusing you are!" laughed Mrs. Moreton. "I assure you, you have more claim to knightly honours than poor Mr. Carlton. Perhaps you do not know that he has lately married, and that Mrs. Carlton is a very charming woman, and one in whom my Sibyl takes a great interest."

"Why didn't she show up at Lady C.'s last night, then?" said the Major, sulky and suspicious still.

"She is in London. Mr. Carlton only came down on business for a day or two.

There is some idea of Sibyl's staying with the Carltons during the season."

"By the Lord Harry!" cried the Major, interested and mollified, "I must get introduced to Mrs. C. at once then. Where does she live? Will the old lady give me a letter, do you think? I don't choose to ask favours of that young cad, the son."

"But if you wish Mr. Carlton's wife to receive you, you must be civil to him of course. They are excessively attached to one another—really quite a pair of turtle-doves, so I hear. It appears Lady Caroline had some absurd views for her son—wished him to marry into what she is pleased to call 'her set,' though I fancy that set does not regard her ladyship with approval or sympathy. There are not many earls' daughters willing to marry even *very rich* men, if their money is made—no one knows where or how! I wonder if you could enlighten us on that point, Major McKenzie?"

"Well, you see, I am not quite at liberty as regards her ladyship," he began, and thought the while. "A good hint,

madam—nothing like curiosity to melt the female breast.”

“Of course; I understand,” answered Mrs. Moreton promptly, and without the faintest sign of annoyance. “Pardon my indiscretion. I was telling you about young Mrs. Carlton. As she had no money to give or lose by her marriage, and as the young man is handsome and *comme il faut*, she could only gain by the step. It now appears she is a lady by birth and education, so her mother-in-law ought to receive her with open arms, and make the best of her. That would be *my* endeavour; but her ladyship at present has sadly neglected her son’s wife—utterly ignores her, in fact. And the poor girl suffers under it. We are sorry for her, and have resolved to bring about a better feeling on Lady Caroline’s part.”

“Quite so,” said the Major absently. His attention was wandering to Sibyl, who was sitting apart, and silent.

“Dear Major McKenzie,” resumed the widow, in her gentlest tone, “you will understand that I am treating you quite

as a friend, and that all I have said has been in the strictest confidence?"

"You do me too much honour, ma'am, I'm sure," said he, and took the opportunity to rise and make a bow.

Having once left his chair, there was less difficulty in going over to where Sibyl was gazing into the fire, taking not the slightest heed of her mother or their visitor. He could endure this indifference no longer.

"I fear you are fatigued," he said, taking his stand on the rug, where he could look down on her pale face. "Have you been walking too much, do you think?"

"No; I am not tired," she answered, listlessly.

"I had hoped," he resumed, stammering again in his eagerness—"that is, I did not know if you—and Mrs. Moreton, of course—would object to a drive this afternoon? I suppose I daren't hope you would give me the pleasure of your company in my phaeton, which of course would be best of all? There is a decent laudau at the hotel, and a couple of

horses that step well; and if I might call for you, and if you would not mind dining—”

“Thank you so much, dear Major McKenzie,” said Mrs. Moreton, rising. “You are very kind; but really my arduous duties necessitate *my* refusing your offer. Another day, perhaps. Already I have given too much time to visitors. My dear girls miss me so, they never seem able to get on without me. Sibyl dear, what do you say?”

“What about? Driving? No, thanks. I shall not go out again to-day. Excuse me, Major McKenzie.”

This she said to induce him to step aside. He had planted himself on the rug before her, and she, who had risen, could not move away. He gave a jump as he “begged pardon,” on which she extended her finger tips. He took them mechanically, and only realised that she had said “good-bye” when the door closed after her.

“Mrs. Moreton, why does she treat me like this?” cried Major McKenzie, clenching that tell-tale fist of his in



his endeavour to subdue his angry mortification.

“My dear Major,” said Mrs. Moreton, deprecatingly, “you surely cannot suppose that my Sibyl was in any sense wanting in courtesy to you? She is so considerate. She heard me tell you that my girls are waiting for me, and so has gone to take my place, knowing that I should not like to leave you hurriedly.”

“Pray don’t let me keep you,” he said, snappishly. “Your daughter has already taken care to let me feel how much *de trop* I am in this house.”

It would have been pitiful, had it not been ridiculous, to see the sudden change in manner and bearing of the Major. He who had hitherto been so thoroughly self-satisfied was now crest-fallen and dejected. His blustering talk had become stammering confusion, his jaunty swagger a despondent crawl. It had been this man’s assumed privilege to assert himself everywhere, to bully everybody. Now he felt cruelly, though quite politely, snubbed by a woman he admired. Mrs. Moreton,

with her knowledge of character, was fully aware that such "snubbing" in this instance would only increase the fervour of McKenzie's devotion. She knew that in proportion to Sibyl's coldness the Major would become more ardent—up to a certain point. That point reached, passion might turn to fury, and so exhaust itself in its own frenzy. Then, the violence of his emotion checked, Gabriel would probably alienate himself from the cause of so much heart-burning. Bear as the man was, he was too rich to be trifled with. Angry and ruffled as he now felt, he must be subdued and soothed before he left the house—skilfully soothed too; and this was a task Mrs. Moreton took up with the zeal of an accomplished amateur. Indeed, she was almost disappointed when she found how easy it was to tame this "savage," and how very soon she was able to restore him to the level of his self-esteem, from which for a moment he had been rudely shaken.

Mrs. Moreton graciously consented to be driven in McKenzie's (or the hotel's)

landau on Monday next, and had no doubt that Sibyl would then join her. About the dinner? Ah, that she could not decide at present. There were so many engagements pending of one kind and another. And poor Sibyl was so sensitive, and had been quite upset this very morning by the news of the illness of a lady friend.

“The dear girl has acquired a certain repose of manner,” said the fond mother; “but she is really intensely impressionable, and has a wealth of tender feeling, which her womanly reserve teaches her to hide from the eyes of the world. Some people think her proud, but surely such pride is to her honour, poor dear.”

“To me Miss Sibyl has certainly appeared very cold, and absolutely unimpressionable,” cried McKenzie.

“My dear Major, to think that you, *you* of all men, should be so utterly mistaken! No more emotional sensitive being exists than my Sibyl. But there—I will say no more. You may understand all this some day; at present—” and she paused with a meaning sigh.

“But I particularly wish to understand it, and just at present,” he cried impatiently. “What is it? Is there any mystery?”

“Mystery!” she exclaimed, looking up with a startled gleam in her dark eyes. “Mystery!” she repeated, and smiled sadly. “Oh no, no; but I never speak of my sensitive child’s deep inner life of emotion without a feeling of pain. The world might use her cruelly; even you, who seemed a friend, have so misunderstood her. In justice to her let us discuss this subject no further, dear Major McKenzie.” Here the fond mother was visibly affected. She even pressed her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes.

Gabriel was in that state of exaggerated feeling that accompanies all unbridled passion, and quite as much (or more?) moved than Mrs. Moreton.


He came close to her and pressed her hand (with the handkerchief in it) to his lips, and with the least additional encouragement would have thrown himself at her feet, and implored the mother to intercede for him with that tender-hearted

daughter who had so skilfully learned to hide all her inward emotion. Who could know those hidden qualities as well as that mother?

A bell rang at this moment, and echoed loudly through the house. Mrs. Moreton heard it with a feeling of relief and thankfulness. This protracted interview might now be brought to a sudden end without any apparent incivility on her part.

“That is the bell that announces a change of class,” she said hurriedly. “It is imperative for me to go. They are waiting for me now. I am sure, dear Major McKenzie, that under these circumstances you will excuse me? It has been an honour and a pleasure to me to see you in my *humble* home. Good-bye; I shall expect you on Monday, and so will dear Sibyl.”

They went out into the hall together: she stately, dignified, courteous; he swaggering and smirking as was his wont, reconciled to the world in general, and to himself in particular. That this was so any one might perceive who watched him



sauntering along the sea-front, jauntily swinging his cane, defiantly blowing blue cloudlets of cigarette smoke from under his heavy monstache.

\* \* \* \* \*

On that same afternoon Colonel Marsden came to pay his respects to Mrs. Moreton, who received him with an amount of *empressement* truly flattering to the old soldier.

Having worked hard in her daughter's cause in the morning, the widow considered herself entitled to a little relaxation on her own account now, and this she found in a decorous flirtation with the Colonel. To add some business considerations to her pleasure was a part of this clever woman's constant programme in all affairs of life, and here was an inviting opportunity. But the tempting subject of the Colonel's daughters was merely hinted at to-day; he should not be allowed to suspect as yet that Mrs. Moreton had resolved to win them as pupils, and "paying pupils" too. As she had made up her mind thoroughly on that subject, the betting was 100 to 1 that

she would carry, the day in her own time and fashion. And he who took the odds on her behalf was bound to win. There was another and a more pressing matter in which Mrs. Moreton required assistance. Sibyl had heard at Lady Carlton's of a certain great ball to be given the following week at Lady Graän Basilisk's, the leader at this time of the "first set" in St. Leonards. To this ball Sibyl was fully determined to go. After Mrs. Moreton's late experience of Lady Caroline's fashion of bestowing favours, she did not wish to get a card of invitation through her ladyship if it might be otherwise obtained. The Colonel and his married daughter, Mrs. Winter (of whom more will have to be said by and by), had the *entrée* to Lady Basilisk's exclusive circle, and through her new admirer Mrs. Moreton resolved to gain the invitation which Sibyl desired.

With gentle speeches and some happy flattery, not to mention the laying of a shapely hand on a susceptible coat-sleeve, the widow accomplished her object. The

very same night brought her the welcome card.

“I shall make McKenzie go up to London to get me some flowers I want for my dress,” said Sibyl, almost smiling in her elation.

And who shall deny that her mother merited the sleep that visits the pillow of those who toil and have achieved, when, after a day of such arduous striving for her daughter’s sake, she laid her weary head to rest, and slept “the sleep of the just?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Hubert Carlton went to Glenville House each day of his protracted stay at Hastings, and had several further consultations with his clever self-constituted Mentor. When, during these interviews, Mrs. Moreton was occasionally called away, Sibyl would come and entertain the visitor, to which change he by no means objected.

It was on the Sunday that Sibyl had her longest talk with Carlton, and then for the first time she of her own accord mentioned his wife.



“ I quite long to have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Carlton some day,” she said.

“ Pearl will be delighted,” he answered readily. “ She has as yet made no friends ; the people about us seem to me so commonplace. And Pearl is so appreciative and talented herself, that you and she are sure to get on well together.”

“ I am afraid that is meant as a cut at my indolence and ignorance, Mr. Carlton,” said Sibyl reproachfully.

“ Good Heavens, no !” cried he, really shocked at such an imputation.

“ In any case, whether you meant it or not, it was fully deserved,” she replied, “ though you cannot know how utterly I lack accomplishments. I neither play nor sing ; I have no drawings to show you ; and our conversation, though pleasant certainly, has been strictly limited as to subjects. We have never gone beyond the opera in our remarks, I think, unless it was to the ballet ; and that always follows as a natural consequence, does it not ?”

They both laughed, and he said, “ You

never open your lips without speaking wittily and to the point."

"You are easily amused," she replied, and continued after a little pause: "I am beginning to wonder if there is anything I *can* do. I never walk, or row, or croquet, or attempt any of the active pursuits affected by young ladies; the exertion is quite too much. I do not even ride now, though that I might be induced to attempt again for a sufficient reason. I very seldom read; if I do, it must be a French novel—English ones are not sufficiently—entertaining; they send me to sleep. All I really care about is to wear well-made dresses, to show them and myself on the Parade, to sit by the fire in placid delicious idleness, thus. I do not think I should ever care to move from here if dinner-time did not occasionally suggest a pleasant diversion. Have you any sympathy with such shocking indolence, Mr. Carlton?" she continued, laying her head quite back upon the chair. She thus raised her chin, and gave the most favourable view of her features *en silhouette*. Her eyes were

closed, and her hands clasped above her shining hair.

He did not answer her last vague question, but stood contemplating her in silence. After a while she spoke again :

“ Having sufficiently exposed my utter ignorance to you,” she said, “ can you conscientiously affirm again that Mrs. Carlton and I should suit one another? Mamma has told me all about her. She is very clever and very energetic; she reads heavy books, and works, as though for her daily bread, at all sorts of self-imposed tasks. If she and lazy I *do* agree, it must be on the principle that ‘ extremes meet.’ ”

“ I don’t know what principle may be involved,” said he eagerly; “ but I am sure that you and Pearl would get on well, as I am that you are a clever and superior woman, whose friendship must benefit another.”

“ You surely do not intend me to get up and make you a curtsy, Mr. Carlton?” she asked, smiling. “ After all, anything I could say or do would prove an in-

adequate return for your subtle compliments."

"I would not for the world have you disturb yourself," said he, "your position is evidently as comfortable to yourself as it is pleasing to me to see you enjoying that 'delicious idleness' of which you spoke with such touching warmth and feeling just now."

"Of what was Sibyl speaking warmly?" asked Mrs. Moreton, entering the room at this moment, and looking with her keenly-scrutinising glance from listless Sibyl to Carlton, who stood on the rug by her side.

"My dear mamma, if only you could have heard!" said Sibyl, smiling again. "Mr. Carlton has been feeding me with the honey of pure adulation. So much sweetness cloy; it has made me quite sleepy. Talk to mamma now, Mr. Carlton, and let me dream on undisturbed."



## CHAPTER V.

### FINESSE.

**L**ATER on that Sunday afternoon Carlton sought his mother.

Lady Caroline was in her boudoir, and she saw at once that Hubert had come to talk to her on some subject nearer his heart than were their ordinary business discussions. He had, in fact, resolved once more to broach the subject of Pearl, and this was the first time her name had been mentioned between them since that bitterly-painful interview held more than six months ago, in that same room.

“Mother, I must speak to you about

my dear little wife," said Hubert, with a tremble in his voice and a tender look in his eyes. "I do hope that in common charity, or let us say justice, you will listen to what I have to ask of you, for her sake."

He paused, expecting some angry reply, or an absolute refusal to hear another word on this subject. To his surprise Lady Caroline said,

"Certainly I will listen. I only wonder you have not taken the trouble to mention *your wife* to me before. When last we spoke of her, remember, she was only Miss Gray."

"Bless her, yes! Don't be afraid. I am not going to inflict *my* feelings upon you. She is very anxious to see you, mother; when will you let her come to you?"

"Some day. When I do see her, it would be as well that she should impress me favourably? Is that so? Oh, you admit it. Thanks; now tell me, has she any *savoir-faire*? Is she—is she a woman of the world?"

"God forbid! Not in the sense you

mean; such as Mrs. Monkstown or those Morrison girls."

"Very striking girls they are, Hubert."

"Too striking by far, to my mind. No, mother; my Pearl is a true woman, with more feeling and good sense in her little finger than those professed flirts have in the whole of their great chignoned heads."

"Just as I feared. A rustic Phyllis, good in her way and in her place, no doubt, but would in our society be shy, awkward, at a loss."

"Pearl could never be either. She is a lady in the true sense of the word."

"Granted again. But, honestly now, would not a little polish be beneficial to her? How does she dress?"

"Very simply."

"As well as Sibyl Moreton?"

"In quite a different style."

"*As well*, I asked. Can't you answer me?"

"Perhaps not with that elegance, that *je ne sais quoi*. I do not believe Pearl ever troubles herself about what she



wears, but I do know that she always looks charming in her simple way."

"Touching, really, and quite understood. Do you restrict her expenditure?"

"Certainly not. It seems to me she spends nothing on herself."

"Who makes her dresses?"

"She makes them with her maid."

"How naïve! A second Penelope; just as harmless and quite as interesting. Poor boy, how bored you will be by and by!"

"Mother, really, you try me too far. I have endeavoured to curb my tongue; but—"

"There, there! Don't be childish, Hubert. Do not make any assertions, and pray do not let us quarrel again over this rustic paragon. After all, I am your mother, and have a right to express my opinions on you or yours. By way of a pleasing change, or rather by way of contrast, I want to say a word about Sibyl Moreton. She is clever, knows the world, knows how to dress. She might give your wife some useful hints. It



would be well they should be known to one another."

"Strange, the very same thought has occurred to me."

"Very strange, truly. Did it occur during one of your consultations with Mrs. Moreton?"

"Consultations!"

"Yes, yes. Don't try to look so prodigiously astonished. I am not blaming you in the least, my boy. You are still a very child; almost as naïve as—as Phyllis. You talk about *her* sense! For one who has an amazing amount of that commodity in her little finger, and in her big head too, commend me to Mrs. Moreton. She might teach you startling results of an extensive experience, utterly beyond the ken of your youthful philosophy. As an instance—"

"Major McKenzie," announced the butler solemnly, and waited for the verdict at the door of her ladyship's boudoir.

"Not in here. I will see him in the drawing-room," said Lady Caroline

hurriedly. She was quite aware of the sudden look of anger in her son's face.

"I cannot imagine how you can allow such a cad, such a low brute—"

"Hush, Hubert! How dare you speak in that way of a friend of mine!" cried his mother.

"I do dare; and you know it's the truth. He cannot be a friend of yours. Why do you tolerate him?"

"For his poor father's sake—far away."

"His *poor* father! He is a good deal better off than any one we know nearer home."

"Dear Hugh, don't seek to misunderstand me. Old McKenzie once did me a very great service—it is many years ago now; before I married your father. But I consider myself under lasting obligations to him; which feeling I trust you, my son, will respect. And therefore, should it ever be in your power to serve Gabriel, do so for your mother's sake. Will you, Hugh?"

"My dear mother," cried he warmly, "if you speak to me in that way there is

nothing I could refuse you." And he meant it. He never remembered his mother so gentle in tone and manner before. The very lines in her face seemed to lose their harshness. He took her hand. "Would you like me to go and do the civil to that black angel Gabriel now at once?" he continued, laughing. "Command, madam, your dutiful son and slave."

"No, dear boy, I will not put you to the test too suddenly," she answered. "I am accustomed to the pompous little man's ways. His bark is really far worse than his bite. We get on very well together. By the by, you are going to the reception at Glenville House this evening, are you not? Be sure you make my excuses to the ladies there. Put them plausibly, Hugh; I really will go another evening. But I am such an invalid *at times*, you know!" and Lady Caroline smiled with quite a pleasant look upon her face. Her son watched her sailing out of the room, and realized with a feeling of admiration that, when she looked

amiable, she really was a very handsome woman still.

\* \* \* \* \*

Carlton went by appointment to Glenville House an hour before the other guests were expected. He met his gentle mistress with unusual animation, and eagerly told her how well the matter nearest his heart was progressing.

“I feel that in some way this is, this must be, due to your influence, Mrs. Moreton,” said he. “You are so clever, and you so thoroughly understand Lady Caroline. She herself spoke of you with admiration. And she was in better spirits to-day than I have ever seen her for a long time past.”

“Indeed!” said Mrs. Moreton, with elevated eyebrows, and a meaning smile. “I am delighted to hear it. It is the more surprising as she tells me she is feeling so very unwell, and is quite unequal to the exertion of coming out to-night.” And Mrs. Moreton held up the letter received from her ladyship that morning.

“What a fool I am?” said Carlton, flushing a most ingenuous scarlet.

“Not at all. Only a dear *naïf* boy,” said the widow, patting his arm affectionately.

“I begin to think I really must be *naïf* or a fool, which comes to the same thing,” he said ruefully.

“Mr. Carlton making puns! Wonders will never cease,” remarked Sibyl, gliding in quietly, and coming at once to the fire. “Your sweet girls are waiting to be called in, mamma, and in an agony of delightful anticipation. They are to behold a live ladyship, and a real colonel who has fought ‘battles.’ All this is naturally agitating to the minds of the ‘youthful innocents.’”

“Dear Sibyl, how *can* you speak with such levity?” said her mother deprecatingly.

“Dear mamma, I not only can, but will, talk just as I please. I am not *one of them*, and quite able to face a whole regiment of colonels, though—” here she paused. Her mother went to the door to summon the pupils. Then Sibyl in her

lowest tone added, as if in after-thought, "and yet one man might command and make me tremble in my turn."

Carlton heard, and her tone thrilled on his nerves.

"How fortunate that man would be!" said he.

She neither moved nor spoke.

The "young ladies" entered in blushing confusion, and seated themselves amid much whispering and giggling, as is the wont of school-girls, even "privileged" ones.

Coffee was presently offered, with cream and without moral advice. Then, by way of commencing the evening's festivities, some of the "dear girls" played (sacred music, of course,) and one sang feelingly. Sibyl sat on her low chair by the fire, listening to Carlton's talk, which after a while came round to his favourite topic, "horses."

"And is that the only time you ever entered a horse for a race, Mr. Carlton?" she asked, interested.

"Yes. I trust you do not disapprove?"

"On the contrary; I think it quite

charming. With your knowledge you might do wonders on the turf. How I should love to go and see *our* colours win! Yours would be mine of course, would not they?"

"Any horse wearing *yours* is bound to win," he answered gallantly.

She smiled. She was more lively and in better spirits this evening than Carlton had ever seen her before.

"Well, mine, if you choose," she continued; "and they would be ours, *n'est-ce pas?* How I would back them too! Why, I should be as well set up in gloves as mamma herself is through similar betting transactions;" and here Sibyl mischievously raised her voice.

"My dear Sibyl, hush!" cried "mamma" deprecatingly, while a deep blush rose slowly, and stood alarmingly confessed under her dark eyes.

"You know it is quite true, mamma," continued Sibyl placidly. "I may as well tell Mr. Carlton all about it. Mamma won a dozen pairs of gloves over some little gambling transaction the other night at your house. It is no use remonstrat-

ing, mamma; you know the pair on your hands now was won at cards."

There was an odd mixture of awe, dismay, and curiosity on the six faces of the eagerly-listening "privileged" young ladies. To think that Mrs. Moreton, that paragon of gentle widowhood, that most discreet of matrons, should have made "gambling bets," should have "won gloves!" Those young ladies who had brothers, or cousins, knew by painful experience how "gambling debts" and "betting" were spoken of in the home-circle, and were accordingly amazed.

Mrs. Moreton showed herself more discomfited and ill at ease than Carlton would have believed possible of so self-possessed a lady.

As for Sibyl, she actually laughed. It was an odd low laugh, but infectious, and Hubert laughed too.

"You are like a couple of ridiculous children," said Mrs. Moreton, recovering herself. "You actually alarm my dear girls, who are unaccustomed to such nonsense."

Then, turning to those "dear girls,"



the widow explained that little transaction which culminated in gloves.

“ I was at Lady Caroline Carlton’s house,” she said ; “ the lady we had hoped to see here to-night, but who is an invalid. She can never bear any discussion. There were some hasty words spoken over a card-table. A moot point of whist-law was discussed. My poor dear husband was an authority, and I learnt from him. I was appealed to by a lady interested in the game. My decision was in her favour. She felt the obligation the more as she was playing for heavy stakes, and her loss would have been considerable. To me, as arbitrator, the lady sent some gloves.” This explanation was so impressively delivered, and so satisfactory, that it quite destroyed the uncanny interest previously aroused in the bosoms of the awe-stricken pupils. The opportune arrival of Colonel Marsden and two ladies created a diversion, and the harmony of the evening suffered no further interruption.

But before bidding her daughter good-night, when the girls were in bed and

the guests departed, Mrs. Moreton spoke in so impressive and threatening a manner to Sibyl, that that impassive young lady felt mamma "meant it" this time, and that for the future she must beware of levity where mamma personally was concerned. And as it was decidedly incumbent on mother and daughter to work in unison, as far as outward appearances went, Sibyl unwillingly acknowledged to herself the necessity of abstaining from "exposing" her mother's little weaknesses before an audience.





## CHAPTER VI.

### DORA INSTRUCTS THE SOLICITOR.

“**Y**OUR husband playing truant already? And on a Sunday too? How is this?” said Mr. Walton, entering the dining-room at Fern-Lea, where he found Mrs. Carlton and Dora seated at luncheon.

“Yes, Guardie dear,” said Pearl, rising to meet her old friend, and lifting her face for the usual kiss of welcome; “it does seem a lonely unnatural Sunday; and I am all the more glad you have come. Hubert is at Hastings with Lady Caroline.”

“ Indeed ! And why are you not with him ? Do not let him think that it is possible for him to live without you now. That is a lesson no young wife should allow her husband to learn.”

“ I don’t think any wife would be justified in coming between her husband and his duties, wherever they call him,” said Pearl.

The servant entering prevented further comment at the time, but after luncheon the fond wife returned to the defence of her absent husband, of whose conduct Mr. Walton evidently did not approve. To convince the lawyer how wisely Hubert was acting at Hastings, and how it was entirely for his wife’s sake, and in pleading her cause with his mother that he was engaged, Pearl drew forth Hubert’s letter, and read portions of it to her old friend.

“ He says Mrs. Moreton is a former acquaintance, does he ?” asked the lawyer.

“ Yes. Do you know her ?”

“ I think I have met her. Mr. Carlton

mentions her daughter also, does he not?"

"Yes. He says she is a superior person."

"H'm! ha!"

"Do you know the daughter, Guardie?"

"Yes. I think I met her on one occasion."

"Shall I like her, do you think?"

"Really can't say."

"Guardie, you are not yourself to-day. You forget it is Sunday. You are treating me like a troublesome week-day client, giving me such unsatisfactory answers."

"Poor child, I fear I am very grumpy and disagreeable. Forgive me. I have had a touch of bronchitis again, and that depresses me. Help me to forget my physical woes and my cobwebby City ideas. Where has little Dora gone? May she come for a walk with us? Will you take me round and show me how those new ferns of yours are progressing? You know my interest in all your possessions."

"Yes, Guardie dear. I will go and call Dora, and we will walk over 'the

estate,' and then stroll on into the park, and come back by 'Thompson's Seasons,' past the Star and Garter, and over The Hill."

The three set forth together, and were cheered by the soft breath of spring, and the signs everywhere of reinvigorated life.

"I have a surprise for you at home, Guardie," said Pearl, as they were returning. "You are to see my very own room to-day—my studio and sanctum; it is in the best order now, and quite fit for visitors."

"What a melodramatic picture!" cried Mr. Walton, his attention arrested on the threshold of Pearl's room by Morel's painting, which faced the door. "You may fancy yourself at the play at all hours with that to look at."

"Guardie, you must not speak of my master's best work in that way. It is natural, true, beautiful! There is no staginess about it. Just so Juliet must have looked when she looked at her Romeo. Mr. Morel painted the picture last year. I saw it in Hamburg, fell in love with it, and then the dear old Senator gave it to me

at Christmas. And Hubert decided it should be hung in my sanctum, because it is the thing I love and value most in the house."

"Idolatry!" laughed the lawyer.

"Oh no. The just appreciation of earnest thought and good work, Guardie; and so you will find when you look at it with critical, instead of cavilling, purpose."

"Possibly. Indeed, I believe you could convert me to anything, Mrs. Pearl, because you always are thoroughly in earnest and sincere yourself. You say Mr. Morel painted it. Who is he? Do you know him?"

"Yes, of course. It was he who gave me so much help with my own drawings, and was so patient and so kind to me."

"He was very dear and very good," said Dora, who was nestling close by Pearl's side, her hands clasped round Pearl's arm, and her small golden head resting upon it, while her wistful eyes gazed up at the picture under discussion, and her attentive ears took in all comments.

“He was very dear and very good, little one, was he?” repeated Mr. Walton; then he added, with a sudden remembrance. “By the by, was not that Mr. Morel who suddenly appeared in the corridor at Steinmann’s after your ice-party, Pearl? You then introduced him to me.”

“Yes,” said Dora quickly; “that was the time he was first so very glad and then so very sorry.”

“He did behave oddly: the child is right,” said Mr. Walton. “I remember he decamped that very night on some unknown business, and vexed our senatorial friend. Don’t you recollect, Pearl?”

“Yes. He had to go to Paris suddenly. It was strange. I have wondered about it since; but as I have never seen him again, I could not ask him for any explanation.”

She spoke carelessly. Mr. Walton turned to another picture. Dora’s pathetic voice arrested his attention again.

“It was not because of Paris Mr. Morel went away so quickly,” said the child;



“ it was because of my Pearl. He could not bear her to be taken away by Mr. Carlton, and it made him so sorry ; I am quite sure he cried.”

“ He regretted losing me as a pupil, I really believe,” said Pearl quietly. “ He never had the chance of telling me so, or even of saying good-bye to me ; he was pleased with my work, that I am sure of. I only wish I knew where to find him now. I often want his help and advice.”

Dora’s remark had not surprised Pearl. She was accustomed to the child’s quaint thoughts and sayings. But on Mr. Walton it had made a startling impression.

“ Surely, Pearl, your husband is able to give you whatever help or advice you require,” he said promptly.

“ About my work ? Oh no. He does not know or care about that. But he likes me to have an occupation I enjoy. He knows how willingly I leave whatever I am doing if he should want me elsewhere ; so my work does not interfere with his comfort. But Hubert helping me !” Pearl laughed at the suggestion,

and added, " Ah no ! I want an artist for that. Mr. Morel is the only man who could really assist me. How glad I should be to see him again !"

" So should I," whispered Dora.


The lawyer said nothing.





## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIRST STONE.

N Monday Hubert Carlton returned to Fern-Lea. Pearl flew to meet him, and regardless of who might be looking on, threw her arms around her husband's neck in almost boisterous welcome.

“It is too good to have you back at last, my dearest and best!” she cried. And no one who looked into her radiant face could doubt the joy she felt.

“It really is very pleasant to come back to one's home and one's sweet little wife again,” said Hubert, as, with a sigh of

content, he put his arm around Pearl's shoulders, and walked along the garden-path and on into the house with her. "I am not sure that I ever appreciated my treasures so thoroughly before."

"There we differ, dear," said Pearl, thoughtfully. "You are, I suppose, one of those people the proverb refers to. With you, absence makes the heart grow fonder. That is not the case with me. What I love I would wish to have with me always—always. No parting could make you dearer to me. It is real pain to lose you, and intense pleasure to have you back. But the pain is not got over in the pleasure, or in any sense made up for by it. To me a life of absolute content would be to have you near me, under one roof with me, always. And this I shall feel ten years hence just as keenly as I do to-day. You know I mean it, Hugh, don't you?"

She spoke as earnestly as she felt. He thought, "How this woman loves me!" and said, laughing,

"Yes, little Spoons, I know all about it. Now tell me the news. How are my

four-legged friends? And Dora too: how is little Dora?"

Hearing herself called, Dora came forward reluctantly.

"Have you heard anything about going to school, little one?" asked Carlton. "How do you think you will like that?"

Dora, with a sudden look of doubt and pain, glanced appealingly up into "her" Pearl's face.

"You will not send me away! surely, surely not?" she whispered; and found her answer in Pearl's true eyes.

"What a fond little goosey it is!" said Carlton. "Why, she is actually trembling all over at the thought of being sent off. No; she is not going by the next train; that I will promise her. Dora, I have a treat in store for you. Now don't look frightened this time; it's nothing alarming, I promise you. You shall come to town with me to-morrow and see some strange sights. I will show you where I make my money."

"Is Pearl to come too?" asked Dora.

"Oh, yes; Pearl goes with us. She also is very anxious to find out where our

golden pennies come from. You would not care to go, I suppose, unless Pearl is of the party?"

"No, not a bit," said Dora, this time without any hesitation.

"And so you really mean to introduce me to that mysterious place of yours, Hugh, that has puzzled so many people, and caused so much vague discussion? Your wife feels quite honoured by the prospect of being presented to Messrs. Teak & Brine."

"My wife!" said Carlton. "Oh, you shall assume a different character tomorrow. I mean to give you the privilege of becoming personally acquainted with your husband, Mr. Teak."

So chatting, they went on to the stables. The horses were had out, and duly inspected by the keen eye of the master, and a ride agreed on. An hour later Kitty and Belshazzar ambled into Richmond Park together, bearing mistress and master away, whose spirits equalled their own. The ditches, or "brooks," were by this time of friendly and familiar aspect to Kitty, and she took them in her springy

style as easily as did the big brown horse in his swinging stride.

"I mean to let you hunt on that mare next autumn, Pearl," said Carlton, having watched Kitty's three consecutive performances with satisfaction. "You will like that, won't you?"

"Of course I shall," cried she, delighted. "And then there will be none of those anxious days of suspense for me, which I have so dreaded. I need be in no trouble about your safety if I am out with you, for I shall keep quite close to you always. I have often wondered how I should get through the days that saw you start off in a red coat, and ready for all sorts of wild risks."

"Which you would not in the least object to sharing yourself, I presume?"

"No, not if we were together, of course."

"Then we will be together, of course."

"Always, Hugh?"

"If you so decree, Pearl."

"I wish it, and that only, with all my heart. And now, Hugh, we are ready to race you up to the three-tree point,"

she said gaily. Then touching Kitty's shoulders, cried "Off!" and with a gay laugh settled to a short half-mile in racing form.

Whether it was due to the mare's turn for speed or to Carlton's gallantry cannot be stated; certain only was the result. The lady won by a neck, and was much elated accordingly. Turning the mare's head well to the wind, and giving her time to recover, Pearl sat in lazy content on her saddle, and stated that she found life most delightful.

"Of course, the winner always crows," laughed Carlton. "It will be my turn next, though, young lady, and then we'll ride for stakes."

"What are stakes?" asked Pearl.

"You little ignoramus, I really believe you have never seen a race!"

"I plead guilty in abject humility, Hugh. To my shame, be it confessed, I never have seen one."

"I mean to take you to the Oaks and to Ascot this year, Pearl; and perhaps in the late summer we will stroll down to Sussex for the fortnight. There, I hope,



Sibyl Moreton will join us. You will be pleased with her, and admire her; of that I am sure, Pearl. You are one of the few generous women—and I believe there are very few—who can admit beauty and talent in others. In her you will see both.”

“I know I shall admire her if you do, Hugh. Is your mother fond of her?”

“Fond?” repeated he, with a dubious smile. “Fond? No. I never knew her ladyship *fond* of any one. But she thinks highly of this girl, which, under the circumstances, is fortunate.”

“Yes? Tell me, Hugh, is this girl younger than I am? I have pictured her to myself as quite a woman—what people call a woman of the world.”

“So she is, child, and your senior by half a dozen years at least. And as to experience, why, you are quite a happy innocent baby compared to her. She, I think, has, as the French say, much lived and much suffered.”

“Suffered? Ill health, or other trouble?”

“That I cannot tell. There is a look

of cold pain on her face sometimes that sets one wondering. . . .”

“Has she a romantic story? Is she in love?” asked Pearl, interested.

“I can tell you nothing, child, for I know nothing. If you and she ever are intimate, she may confide in you. I know little of her. Her mother is my particular friend, and wishes to prove herself yours also.”

“Have you known them very long, Hugh?”

“Your mare is shivering. We must be moving, Pearl,” cried Hubert, speaking truth as regarded the mare, but confused by a sudden consciousness of having kept a strange little adventure that had happened at Brussels a secret from his wife. He was thankful to find that Pearl at once settled down to “another little spin,” and so forgot her previous inquiry. But to him it had given an unexpected shock. Why had he never told Pearl of that odd meeting? Was it chance or forgetfulness that had sealed his lips? Should he tell her now? It might amuse her, but it would also surely astonish her, to find

that she had been freely canvassed between himself and a chance acquaintance. And yet the bettering of her position towards Lady Caroline had formed the chief theme for discussion between Mrs. Moreton and himself. It would be difficult to explain now, although it had all come about so very naturally. There really was nothing odd in the whole matter, if looked at and understood from his point of view. So with the proverbial fear of "argument" characteristic of men where their womankind is concerned, Hubert held his peace, and in silence passed over a little fact, which if told even now would have been received as quite natural, but which, being suppressed, became the first stone of an unseen barrier, in time to grow mighty in its dividing power.

That convenient "spin" lasted with scarce a check for quite ten minutes. Both mistress and mare were in good training by this time, and nothing short of racing speed made either breathless at the finish.

During Hubert's absence plenty of papers had accumulated, and these were

to be read aloud to the truant husband on this first evening of his home-coming. After dinner Pearl settled herself down to her pleasant task, and rejoiced to find Hubert listening with evident interest. At last,

“Not another word, wife,” said he peremptorily. “What a devoted little woman it really is! I do believe you would read yourself as hoarse as a raven, if you thought I was amused in listening. Come over here and talk to me a bit. You have not told me half of what old Walton said to you on Sunday. Was he very indignant at my enforced absence?”

“He wondered a little, I think; but I explained to him that it was best so, and convinced him, I hope. It appears he has met the Moretons also.”

“Indeed! Did he say much about them?”

“No; very little. He had had bronchitis, poor dear Guardie, and was cross and quite unlike himself. I have not told you of all our proposed gaiety yet, Hugh. Look at my invitations. Actually three of them! Which am I to accept?”

and laughing, Mrs. Carlton took from her writing-table three scented notes, and laid them before her husband. "We had better dine at Mrs. Loftus's, I suppose?" she asked, making a very wry face at the prospect. "If I find out about your business to-morrow, Hugh, Mrs. Loftus will have a better chance in her next subtle cross-examination. And we must go to the clergyman's musical evening, don't you think?"

"What, accept all these alluring invitations! Tempt me not, Pearl; so much reckless gaiety, methinks—But there, no matter; we will dissemble."

"Hugh, what spirits you are in! I never heard you laugh or talk so much nonsense before."

"She calls it nonsense! Soul of my soul, Oh, why these heartless jests? Seriously, little wife, I am pleased with my visit to Hastings, for your dear sake."

She came over to where he was sitting, and, kneeling by his side, laid her face down on his hand.

"You are so kind, so dear," she whispered tenderly. "Tell me, are there

hopes for us now? Is Lady Caroline really relenting? Will she receive me?"

"Of course she will. That she has promised. Also she has been pleased to announce that she would like to hear from some disinterested witness what manner of woman you are. Not exactly complimentary to you or to me, darling; but my mother has odd ways of her own, and being my mother, thinks she should be humoured; just as, being Lady Caroline Carlton, she has always succeeded in getting her own way with those about her."

"Do you mean, Hugh, that Lady Caroline would like to ask Mrs. Moreton about me? It all seems so strange."

"Yes, but though strange, quite true. Now if Sibyl even could see and learn to appreciate you—she also takes a kindly interest in my dear wife, I think."

"Am I to go and see them at Hastings?" asked Pearl, flushing hotly at the thought.

"No; you would not be yourself or at your ease there; the better plan would be to invite Miss Moreton here."

"Yes; much better. You always think

of what will be nicest, Hugh dear. I shall like her companionship, and she will give me all sorts of information about London society and London fashions and ways, of which I am so ignorant."

"Will you write to Miss Moreton, Pearl?"

"Certainly. To-night or to-morrow, as you please, Hugh."

"You may as well write to-night. And when had she better come, Pearl?"

"That I will leave to her. She can choose her own time. Dear Hugh, you do like her, don't you? You are not going to be bored by having a lady in the house that you don't care for, and all for my sake, are you?"

"No, little woman. I think the visit may do good, and bring about the reconciliation your loving heart so much desires. But in any case, it will be a pleasure to me as well as to you to have Sibyl Moreton staying at Fern-Lea."



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SOLICITOR MAKES A MOVE.

“**I**S Mrs. Moreton at home?” asked Mr. Walton of Jane, the parlour-maid, at Glenville House. And he soon found himself in the lady’s presence.

Substantial-looking elderly gentlemen wearing glossy hats, and being otherwise clothed in the spotless broadcloth of prosperous propriety, were always presupposed by Jane to be fathers intent on introducing “fresh ladies” to “the establishment,” of which Jane formed no unimportant member. Jane was quiet,



cunning, fond of half-crowns, and very discreet when discretion was desirable. This she proved by the becoming deference with which she treated confiding parents, who would never have suspected this neat and demure young person of the sprightly levity she affected when waiting upon "Miss Sibyl's gents." Of those so classified, a far greater number came periodically to the house than innocent pupils or their trusting mammas and papas would have dreamt of as possible in any "properly-regulated" establishment. Surely it is well that all things are not visible to all beholders, or what would become of that highly-exalted yet much abused word—"confidence?"

"This is indeed an unexpected but a very great pleasure," said Mrs. Moreton, taking her guest's proffered hand in both hers. "Let me beg of you to come to the fire. The sun is warm, but the wind so chilly still. Have you been long in Hastings, Mr. Walton?"

"No. I only left London this morning, and have come straight to your house."

“Indeed! And have you seen Mr. Carlton since his return?”

“Oh, he *has* gone home?”

“Yes; to our great regret. But then, dear fellow, he is so devoted to his little wife, there was no keeping him an extra hour even. She must be a charming person! Your client and ward, I am told?”

“Both. And better still, my very dear friend.”

“That makes all such relations so pleasant and happy, does it not? I am anxious to meet Mrs. Carlton myself. Her husband is quite her slave. We tried to induce him to stay over Thursday for the great event of our Hastings season, but he had *promised*, he said, and so went.”

“He would have been much to blame,” remarked Mr. Walton gravely, “if on any selfish account he had stayed away from Mrs. Carlton. Husbands are always best at home, and should not get into the way of gadding after so-called pleasure without their wives. That’s my opinion.”

“And yet, with such excellent theories,

you are still a bachelor, Mr. Walton? How happy will she be who, one of these days, finds in you her constant safeguard and companion! You really owe it as a duty to both sexes to prove to them what ideal matrimony might become in practice."

"No doubt it appears very amusing to you to laugh at an old man's foibles," said Mr. Walton, somewhat testily; "and I feel adequately rewarded for having obtruded my antiquated notions upon you, Mrs. Moreton. Allow me to apologise, as I have to interrupt your merriment. My intention in coming to you to-day was neither to theorise or to be laughed at, but simply to propose a business matter to you. I think I have found two pupils likely to suit you."

The widow, with an air of contrition, bowed her handsome head.

"How could you so misunderstand me, my dear wise friend?" she said. "You are the very last person in the world whose sound practical ideas I could dream of ridiculing. I am only too happy to find you have really taken the trouble to

visit Hastings on my account. You have noticed my absurdly good spirits, and quite misinterpreted them. Was it so?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Walton rose and went over to the fire, on which he turned his back, and looked searchingly down at the clever face below him. His attitude meant "business," a call to which no one was better able to respond to, than the keen-eyed, sharp-witted woman before him, if it so suited her. What personal object Mr. Walton had in coming all the way to Hastings for the sake of introducing pupils to her mattered very little at present. The great fact was assured. There were two veritable Misses Tennyson in the case, whose uncle was willing to pay—with some not unreasonable deductions—the large sum annually required by Mrs. Moreton in return for her tender care of ladies "placed" with her.

As Mr. Walton explained the case of his client, and the impossibility of that gentleman's doing more for the nieces suddenly left to his charge than finding a suitable home for them, Mrs. Moreton

thought she fully understood the lawyer's object in having come to her himself, and at once said so, in a low confidential tone that somehow reminded Mr. Walton of the stage-whisper of "confederates" in the drama.

"I see, I quite see, dear Mr. Walton," she said. "You thought it best to visit me personally. No doubt you have quite made up your mind as to what you require and expect under these peculiar circumstances."

The lawyer looked at the lady from under his shaggy gray brows in undisguised amazement. She lifted a deprecating hand, and continued:

"Indeed, I think this the most natural course, my dear Sir, and hope you will speak unreservedly with me. At the same time, believe me, I fully appreciate your delicacy and hesitation. For my part, I am always quite straightforward in matters of business, and have no scruple in asking you frankly what commission you expect in this or similar affairs."

As he still stood silent, literally dumb

with surprise, she continued in the tone she used when she encouraged a timid pupil,

“ If those deductions are made by your client, you will of course suffer as well as I; but surely, with a little insistence, we may induce him to pay full terms, more especially as I thoroughly understand and am willing to comply with all his wishes. What *he* desires is to hear and see nothing of these girls. Parents are so inconsiderate in troubling relatives to look after their children. This uncle, no doubt, is a man of the world, and will be glad to find me able to appreciate his position, and relieve him of all responsibility as regards a pair of troublesome schoolgirls. But in return I expect him to pay me well, and this he surely will not object to do, more especially as the father refunds him.”

During this frank explanation of Mrs. Moreton's ideas as to “straightforward business,” Mr. Walton had had time to recover from his first surprise. A fine smile came to his lips as he said,

“As this is our first joint business

transaction, my dear madam, I beg you will accept whatever advantages it may afford. On the next occasion I shall probably ask for my commission. At the same time, I would suggest that such deductions as my client wishes should be made, and this I do not doubt you will be ready to do under the circumstances."

Mrs. Moreton acquiesced gratefully, and overwhelmed Mr. Walton with offers of hospitality.

"I fear you will not care for our grand ball down here," she said. "I should be delighted to introduce you, if you would come. Lady Caroline Carlton will be present, and a host of people are coming from town on purpose. Colonel Marsden—do you know Colonel Marsden?—he has, at my instance, procured an invitation for my dear Sibyl. Of course, I am compelled to go as chaperon. There was actually some difficulty in getting a card for us. The "sets" here are so exclusive, and the most absurd punctilio is observed. Lady Graän Basilisk surely need not give herself airs! We know all about the Baron, and in what part of Poland he is

to be found. You have heard the scandal, of course?"

"Is it to the house of *his* wife people are anxiously crowding?" asked Mr. Walton, laughing.

"Yes, and all the best people in the place will be found there too. Gentlemen are always welcome, as you know. Won't you come? It will amuse you, I am sure."

"Thanks; no. I will give my chance to more sprightly cavaliers. Is that a daughter of yours, Mrs. Moreton?" continued the lawyer, rising, and going over to look at the portrait of the lady with the boldly-defiant eyes.

"Yes; and a happy and fortunate girl she is too, and has been no trouble to me at all. That is her husband's picture. He met her soon after our return from India. He settled a thousand a year upon her. He is a wine-merchant; they live in Lisbon. He is an elderly man and a Jew; but what does that matter? His wife has all she asks for. I only wish Sibyl had made as good use of her time."



At this moment Sibyl entered, and after a distant bow to Mr. Walton, informed her mother that Major McKenzie had just driven up.

“I wish him to come in here,” she said, “and I have told Jane so. I must see him—he has brought those flowers for my dress—but not alone; he bores me too much.”

“My dear Sibyl, Mr. Walton and I—”

“Pray do not let me trespass any longer,” said the lawyer, rising; “our business is concluded, and I will take my leave.”





## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LILY LADY.

**W**HEN Major McKenzie entered the room, Mrs. Moreton's rapid thought suggested to her that Mr. Walton would be a likely person to ascertain for her more definitely than she had yet been able to do the exact sum of ready money at present at Gabriel's disposal. So she introduced the men to one another, and begged Mr. Walton to remain a little longer, as a special favour to herself. To her astonishment, Mr. Walton was quite ready to stay, and entered with interest into an animated conversation with the Major, whose powers

of talk, when encouraged by an audience, were boundless. His passion for his fair charmer was still at fever heat, and betrayed itself in his every look, and in most of the words he spoke, which invariably came back to *her* sooner or later.

Mr. Walton had come to Hastings with a distinct object, and this unexpected meeting with Major McKenzie filled him with satisfaction, and gave him hopes that the evil he had begun to fear might be averted, thanks to the timely appearance of this swarthy suitor of Sibyl's. Indeed, the lawyer after a while grew so much interested in the polite comedy being enacted before him that he stayed on to luncheon, and finally agreed to be taken to "the ball" of the Hastings season. There, protected by the ample shadow of Mrs. Moreton's black wings, he hoped to take quiet notes on the new aspect of life thus presented to him.

Sibyl, without the slightest hesitation, had accepted Major McKenzie's offer to procure for her whatever she might be pleased to desire to complete her toilette for the "great event." She had seen,

when last in town, at Madame Virginie's a certain elaborate garniture of creamy water-lilies mounted on appropriate glossy dark leaves, and she had then resolved that just such garlands should ornament her white-silk dress at the next ball she went to. The lilies were very beautiful, and their price "tip-top," as the Major delicately hinted to his charmer. He had travelled to London the day before to obey her commands, and had secured all she desired. She rewarded him by a faint smile, and whispered her gratitude for the trouble he had taken on her account. But the hour of his triumph was yet to come. That was when Sibyl, leaning on Mr. Walton's arm, entered Lady Basilisk's drawing-room. Then Gabriel, in a frenzy of impatience, went forward to meet this Queen Lily, decked in *his* flowers, and to claim from her the first valse on her arrival, which had been promised to him.

There was a stir in Lady Basilisk's room, and a certain sensation caused, as Sibyl, lily-faced, lily-clad, appeared. Her extreme pallor, the burnished gloss and

sheen of her hair, and the artistic beauty of her dress riveted the attention of men and women, and the ungainly swarthy of Gabriel, on whose arm she leant, and above whose thick black head hers rose, slenderly poised and graceful, only served by crass contrast to enhance the pure brilliancy of her dazzling appearance. Even Lady 'Graän Basilisk acknowledged that Colonel Marsden was right when he suggested that this girl ought to be invited, and rejoiced inwardly in having secured her presence at this "event."

Ill-natured persons had been heard to talk of Lady Basilisk as an adventuress. But what will not idle tongues say? After all, what do such sayings matter? Do we not all know that virtue in the end always triumphs? Here was another proof of such deserved reward. This high-spirited lady, now aged quite sixty years, had waged war all her long life against evil tongues, and yet held her own gallantly, possibly assisted by *her* tongue (which was a much-used member), under the most chequered circumstances. The battle had been very hard at times, but

for the last two years success had crowned her ladyship's efforts. She now stood proudly on the eminence so long struggled for, holding her own bravely, and being besought on the right hand and the left for her favours and her patronage.

A wonderful woman! With a profusion of soft pale-brown hair, in which no roots and no tell-tale parting were discernible; only countless little love-locks coquettishly falling on to the delicately traced eyebrows, while other longer love-locks were heaped and piled in reckless profusion, and sat like a crown on her "aristocratic" head. A woman on whose cheek and on whose lips lay the bright tints of brilliantly healthful youth, and in whose eyes, although no shading or toning could rescue them from a certain cavernous *entourage*, there still glittered the spark of an undaunted spirit. A title, such as it was, had come to this woman with her husband. What *he* was, was only spoken of now with bated breath. On that title the enterprising lady had based her attempts at taking the world by storm. It was blazoned abroad on

coroneted paper, it was worked in huge monograms on the smaller articles that constituted her travelling paraphernalia, and it was painted in golden letters on the huge "aristocratic" boxes that had gone the round of all the "Grand Hotels" on the Continent. Those monograms had heralded "milady," and prepared an obsequious welcome for her from eagerly-expectant, hand-rubbing, bowing, and scraping landlords and Oberkellners. And at last, there had come to this undaunted woman the fortune waited, prayed for, counted on, both by the worthy man who, in anticipation of it, had married her, and by herself, for more than forty years. It was late, but not too late. And Lady Basilisk felt that, supported by wealth and title, she could carry all before her even in her chill native land.

From Lady Caroline Carlton there had been decided opposition when first Lady Basilisk opened the campaign in St. Leonards, preparatory to her *début* in London. But the enemy was surprised into friendliness by a most unexpected face-to-face encounter, in which the elder

of the silken-clad warriors freely exposed her hand. A hand that Lady Caroline quickly saw was likely to take and keep the lead, and which would be far more advantageous in a partner, than in an adversary. Thus the "exclusive set" was flourishing, and at its head these two noble ladies reigned supreme. From the moment Sibyl Moreton entered Lady Basilisk's room, she might consider herself one of "the set," if she so chose, bringing to it, as she undeniably did, the *éclat* of personal beauty and distinction. That Mrs. Moreton, with her bright black eyes and her fanciful weeds, which were airy enough not to look amiss even in a ball-room, did not pass through the crowd unheeded, will readily be understood, more especially as her attentive *cavaliere servante* was the much-respected Colonel Marsden. That little episode of the gloves had led to some correspondence, and to prolonged visits to the mistress of Glenville House, and there was on this occasion no more assiduous squire present than the white-haired Colonel proved himself to the dark widow. Gabriel



McKenzie's accomplishments were not numerous ; but there was one art he had practised from his babyhood, instructed by his light-footed Quadroon mother. That was dancing. Waltz he could to perfection, as Sibyl was soon pleased to discover. One would hardly have supposed that so tranquil and apparently passionless a woman could lend herself to the swiftest and wildest evolutions of the dance with a stormily beating heart and a sense of keen physical enjoyment. But so it was. And in Gabriel, Sibyl found a partner in every respect congenial, for his staying powers equalled her own. The first sensation caused by "the lily lady" was augmented visibly by this wonderful waltzing of hers. She commenced with the music, and did not cease until the last strain was carried away in a faintly echoing note. The fact of her partner being shorter than herself only added to her distinction, instead of making both appear ridiculous, as is so often the case with ill-assorted couples, and the perfect ease of his movements saved him from what in an awkward man would have appeared absurd.

People crowded round Lady Basilisk with eager questions, and she, with her usual readiness of resource, made capital out of "the lily lady," whom she immediately surrounded with a halo of aristocratic mystery. That a crowned head suffered by Lady Basilisk's delicate hint certainly hurt the owner of the crowned head not one whit, whereas the subtle breath of slander immediately invested Sibyl with a superhuman attraction. Throughout the crowded room the hostess's innuendo, which presently became known as a "dead secret," was whispered from mouth to ear, and the growing interest in the excited questions, "Have you heard?" "Don't you see the likeness?" completed Sibyl's conquest.

There was but one shadow thrown directly across her forward path during that evening's triumph, and that was of course the work of a woman. A pretty, proud little woman, who held her head high, and "trucked to" no one.

Sibyl, wishing to dance in the "exclusive set" of Lancers arranged by little Mrs. Winter at the far end of the room,

refused to take that lady's decided hint, "Our set is quite formed."

One minute later Miss Moreton found herself and Gabriel standing in isolation, while the music began, and the dancers about them followed with familiar steps the old familiar tune. The set, under the direction of Mrs. Winter, had departed to the other extremity of the long room, to be free from "intruders."

"By the Lord Harry, that woman shall be punished for her impudence!"

"It will be a good day for you when you can come to me and tell me *you* have so punished her," answered Sibyl quietly.





## CHAPTER X.

### AT TEAK AND BRINE'S

**T**HE morning air gladdened Pearl as she opened her window, inhaling its invigorating perfume.

“We shall have a fine day for our excursion to the mysterious old money-making place, Hugh!” she cried, leaning out and kissing her hand to her husband, who was coming back to the house after an early visit of inspection to the stables.

“Come down, if you please, little woman,” he answered; “I am quite ready for my breakfast, I assure you.”

On which Mrs. Carlton hastened to attend upon her lord, of whom she asked

many questions as to their destination ; to which he gave evasive answers, thereby stimulating Dora's curiosity, who sat in silent wonder as to the place she was to be taken to-day, a place even Pearl knew nothing about—Pearl, who knew everything !

Another hour saw the trio fairly on the road, and by eleven o'clock they had reached Fenchurch-street station.

Pearl and Dora were full of wonderment at the preliminary route over rooftops and chimney-pots. A little further on the curious odours of Shadwell, Limehouse, and the Docks still more amazed, but by no means delighted, them. After half an hour's journey and many stoppages Carlton announced,

“ Here we are ; this is the mysterious place ! ”

“ The place ” was by no means attractive. A narrow dismal street led down-hill from the station ; the only clean thing about it was its name, lately painted in white on a black ground. A peculiar name too—Potiphar-lane, E. Why *lane*, no one could imagine, nor could any road

be found more unlike the shady and sequestered winding supposed to be distinguished by that rural word.

“Is this the place you come to every time you have business in London, Hugh?” Pearl asked, picking up her skirts and walking on tip-toe to avoid the inky puddles between the loose paving-stones.


“No; I usually go to the town branch only. That is the office; ledgers and accounts are kept there; this is the place where the actual work goes on.”

“It is not at all a pretty place,” said Dora, pursing up her sensitive little mouth, as she came to a sudden halt at sight of a pool—it seemed to her a lake—of mud, on the brink of which her small feet stood refusing to attempt the crossing.

Carlton lifted her and kept her on his arm.

“Put your hand on my shoulder,” said he, “and you may give me a kiss if you are graciously inclined.”

But this Dora was not, if kissing was the test.



The end of that long Potiphar-lane was reached at last, or at all events there was a turning out of it, which led suddenly into open country. Those words, suggesting fresh air and fair prospects, might mislead the reader. Open here simply meant free from building. The ground was moist and clayey. Sodden patches of dingy grass alternated with heaps of dark-brown soil; hills of "dust"—from what houses the dustman could have gathered *such* débris it would be hard to suggest—stood out in black relief against an attenuated hedge. It was as the skeleton of a country hedge, and the tiny leaflets that had ventured to pierce the rusty bark here and there looked as incongruous as emeralds in a paper crown.

Beyond this great patch of waste land some enterprising spirit had endeavoured to erect human habitations; but the swampy ground and the depressing air of desolation had frustrated the civilising attempt. Now odd piles of bricks alone bore witness to its ever having been made. The dingy dwellings of Potiphar-lane had a certain advantage. There were many

of them so closely built as to afford opportunities for the constant interchange of neighbourly gossip, and civilities ; and though the former often culminated in wild harangues not couched in gentlest terms, and the latter occasionally took the shape of assaults from savage fists and tearing nails, still there was a sense of companionship, of human warmth and fellowship, about these closely huddled dwellings that was evidently preferred to the grander isolation of "t'other side o' Teak & Brine's."

"What *are* we coming to?" asked Mrs. Carlton, making her way as directed down a swampy path, and guiding herself carefully by a black fence.

"Turn in on your right now," replied her husband, laughing at her tone of dismay. And as he spoke he pushed open a narrow door in a panel which formed part of two high wooden gates. Pearl stepped over the frame and found herself in a square yard, as orderly in its details as the kitchen-garden at Fern-Lea ; but what different produce was gathered here ! Immediately confronting her, and



as though prepared to welcome those who entered, stood "Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria."

At this unexpected sight both Pearl and Dora exclaimed.

"Is it a dreadful doll?" asked the latter, clinging closely to Carlton for the first time.

"No; it is a magnificent queen," said he; "look at her golden crown and her chain and her rings."

This regal personage had once been wholly white—hair, face, bosom, and flowing drapery; but a fresh coat of paint was now sadly needed. Only the ornaments Carlton alluded to had retained their normal splendour, and shone out in brassy relief from their dingy setting. The proportions of the figure were heroic, and the train of the heavy wooden robe curled away like the tail of a mermaid.

"A figure-head!" cried Pearl. "And to what an odd vessel she belongs now!"

What Pearl called a vessel—that is, the massive wooden structure under which the gown trailed away—was composed of closely packed beams of dark wood. Long,

short, and medium planks were compactly stowed and piled with mathematical accuracy, until they formed a huge block, solid, black, impenetrable.

“That is our *mountain*,” said Carlton; “and we are all very proud of it. It is undoubtedly the highest of its kind in Europe. It measures just over fifty feet in height, and is composed entirely of the timber *débris* of vessels that have sailed over the mighty deep. There, Pearl, is not that an appropriate explanation for a showman who is unaccustomed to the public exhibition of his goods?” he laughed. But Pearl answered quite seriously,

“It is very clever, Hugh. You are always saying things well. You have a happy knack of expression, as Mr. Walton calls it. And I shall admire your talents more than ever if you tell me that you manage to make all your money in gathering up what is left of wrecks.”

“Not quite, madam. We make the wrecks ourselves. Teak & Brine are ship-breakers, and those very logs, the salt and metal in which colour the flames that

delight you so when they burn all blue and gold in our fireplaces at home, are sent out from this same yard."

"What is in those funny round tubs that are done up so tight?" asked Dora.

"Butter?" suggested Pearl.

"Manufactured from Thames mud? No; though there is plenty of the latter commodity to be found here. Those tubs are for the export trade, of which you heard so much in Hamburg, Mrs. Carlton. They contain fine brass and other delicate ornaments, gathered from the vessels as we break them up. Then we send them on to 'furrin parts'—these tubs, I mean. Would you like to inspect our offices, madam? If so, in the unavoidable absence of Messrs Teak & Bine, perhaps you will permit me to conduct you?"

Pearl laughed, and answered,

"If you are manager here, Mr. Carlton, I am sure the office will have every comfort the heart of man can desire."

"Madam, you do me too much honour," said he, and led the way.

The office was snug and substantially furnished. Startling notices of the sale of

extraordinary articles were hung about on the glazed walls. There was an announcement of the forthcoming sale of the good barque Nautilus, headed by a line of red and blue print like a play-bill. This set forth that "the Vessel and her Stores were to be offered and disposed of, with all Faults and Defects as they now lie, without any allowance for Weight, Length, Quality, Quantity, or Errors or Defects of any Description whatsoever!" The capital letters were of abnormal size, and duly attracted attention.

Dora, seeing Pearl read and laugh as she read, climbed upon a chair, and spelled out slowly, but with added effect: "One caboose-house, one pudding-mould, one pair of tormentors, two fog-horns, one flare-up, sixty rafting-dogs, one jack, three crab-winches, four hooks and thimbles—do they mean hooks and eyes and thimbles?" she asked. "Are they for the sailors to sew with, and do they use those wenches to break the hard shells of the poor crabs?"

After receiving satisfactory explanations of what puzzled her, Dora proceeded

slowly with her odd orthographical lesson :

“ Five and a half gals. of lime-juice—gals and boys went out to play,” Dora interpolated ; on which Pearl told her she was a goosey, and herself continued the perusal of the incongruous list :

“ One fish-pendant, one looking-glass, one gig, one cook’s axe, four sofa-cushions, two devil’s-claws—Hugh, what in the world are devil’s-claws ?”

“ Come out, and I will show you,” said he.

Pearl took a last glance around the snug office, which was brightened by the sheen of beautiful flames, red, blue, and orange, that glowed from the hissing logs sputtering in the large grate. On the mantel-piece above it lay half a dozen fossil-like objects.

“ From an eruption, are they ?” she asked ; and was told, “ No ; slack, with odd nails, and other objects in it, from burnt vessels.”

“ And is this your chair, Mr. Manager ?” asked Pearl again, seating herself, and spreading her arms out over the writing-

table in what she considered a business-like attitude.

"No," said Carlton; "that is Mr. Brine's chair, filled in his absence by our much-respected valued foreman. Here he comes. Allow me to present Mr. Brine Stock to Mrs. Teak Carlton," he added, as an elderly grizzled man, with a look of "the man at the wheel" about him, entered the office and respectfully saluted the ladies.

"Can we go over the Trojan?" asked Carlton.

Mr. Stock bowed assent; ready speech was evidently out of his line. He then led the way, Mrs. Carlton following with her husband, who again carried Dora.





## CHAPTER XI.

MR. STOCK, "OUR FOREMAN."

**M**R. STOCK led on, and they now went beyond the mountain of timber, and found themselves in the midst of activity and noise.

Hammers, axes, saws, and mallets were wielded by strong brown hands. The workmen seemed cheerful, and evidently approved of their variously destructive occupations, which were mostly carried on to the accompaniments of songs or whistling.

"What are they all making?" asked Dora.

"Nothing, child," said Carlton. "Their task—a hard and difficult one, too, at times—is to *unmake*: to tear, break, and separate what others have taken days, weeks, months to construct, arrange, and fit for the transport of human and other freight over the far deep seas. Do you understand, Dora?"

"Not quite," she said, her wistful eyes noting with wondering interest the new objects surrounding her. "But my Pearl will tell me all about everything by and by."

"What it is to be *your* Pearl!" said Carlton, kissing the soft pale cheek that rested near his shoulder.

"You know she likes best to be *yours*," answered the child, withdrawing her face to look straight into his eyes, "and she is never happy when you are away. You must be very, very good to her always—Oh! hold her, hold her!" cried Dora, struggling to get down, and leave Hubert free to assist his wife, who was at this moment ascending a slippery and almost perpendicularly-poised plank.

This plank led on to the hull of a



vessel—a huge black vessel of special interest, for she had been much used, and more abused, in the Crimea, where a death-blow had been dealt to her. And now she lay off Teak & Brine's wharf in the Thames awaiting her annihilation.

Mr. Stock respectfully offered his arm to Mrs. Carlton. She leant upon it lightly, fearing to hurt the man's feelings by refusing his aid. But she was well used to walking in rough places, and rather liked the spice of danger. She now trod bravely with her small sure feet over the slippery plank, and jumped from the vessel's side down on to such landing as the uneven deck offered.

“Deck number two, ma'am,” announced Stock, in a sepulchral tone. Mrs. Carlton glanced up quickly, to see if he could have really produced so bass a sound. As she was looking he spoke again, but not a muscle of his face was seen to move while the next words issued from that grizzly beard. “Number one deck gone, ma'am; number three and four left below.”

“Four decks?” asked Mrs. Carlton,

following the horny finger of this mysterious man, who seemed to have no connection with his own voice and speech.

"Show them to you, with the young master's leave."

But number two deck was in itself sufficiently attractive at this moment. Pearl, after glancing around, walked straight away to the stern of the vessel, and kneeling, regardless of the wet, peered through the open port-holes.

The sight that presented itself to her admiring eyes brought the mysterious haze and subdued glow of a dimly remembered picture of Turner's to her mind. There was no sun upon the river; a soft gray mist curled tenderly around the vessels that lay in close but stately array Londonwards.

"Quite a regiment of graceful schooners are ranged here," cried Pearl, delighted. "What sort of vessels are those with the pretty sails? Are they for pleasure?"

"They're for coals, ma'am. There's fifty or sixty off there, waiting to unload. If they look their best from here, they wouldn't near by—they're black."

But to Pearl the colliers appeared graceful and beautiful, as, with sails spread, they lay in true line, like a well-drilled detachment of regulars.

Dora now cried out to Pearl to come and look.

"I have found the beautifullest chicken's ladders," she said; "may we take them home to Fern-Lea, for the last little golden brood to learn to walk up and down? Do you think these were meant for chickens that went to sea?"

"No, bottles," said Stock curtly, which frightened Dora.

Carlton then explained that these planks with the ladder-steps upon them were bottle-racks.

His wife came up to listen to the words of wisdom that fell from his dear lips; and mentally the loving little woman commented, "How clever he is! How well he understands all these strange things!"

There were further explorations to be undertaken, down more dangerous ladders and into deeper wooden depths. Mrs. Carlton had grown accustomed to the

foreman's gruff tone and odd manner, and enjoyed the novelty. And he, seeing her really interested and anxious for information, expanded under the sunshine of her bright face, and though himself as grave as before, answered her questions as well as he was able, giving her elaborate explanations and indulging in a flow of language that Carlton had never believed him capable of.

Down between the lower decks Mrs. Carlton was shown the position and size of the men's berths. She pitied the poor fellows sincerely, and wondered "how they could have slept at all, cramped up like that." Mr. Stock showed her "hanging knees" and "laying knees" and "ship's bolts" (of amazing size) and "Sampson-posts" (still more amazing); and their various uses were fully explained. In one suspicious-looking place Pearl probed the vessel's side with her finger, and found the wood crumbling into yellow dust at her touch.

"That does not seem to have been very strong stuff to build a vessel with?"

she added interrogatively. On which her Mentor explained :

“Green oak, not seasoned, wet with sap. Cruel to builders, cruel to buyers, bad for sailors. Only good for Government contractors. Dry-rot sets in, of course. All is eaten away like this.” And he plunged his hard fist into the brittle wood, and sent it flying in clouds of dust. “No stopping ’em once they go like this. That’s why she’s being broke. Else she might have been tinkered up for another ten years.” About the fact of her being “broke” there could be no doubt; the work of destruction was going on with a vengeance.

A huge crane was labouring away steadily. It thrust forth its great iron arm, whence hung a clanking chain, above the heads of the visitors; and the mighty limb seemed to seize the trophies of destruction presented by the willing hands of the workmen, and carry the spoil aloft. Nothing was too large or too heavy. Loads of timber, barrels, even those monstrous Sampson-posts, that had been laid low by the hands of the destroyers,

were clutched by this grip of iron and carried away. The engine snorted, the crane creaked, as the trophies were whirled on to land, where eager human hands received the burdens, and completed the work of demolition. There all was sorted and sifted, and each part allotted to its temporary destination. To "the mountain" thousands of planks were added weekly, and thus it had grown to its present magnitude, a tribute to the patient perseverance of the powers of destruction. On the lowest deck Dora picked up what looked to her like a pancake.

"But, oh, so flabby," she said, and dropped the mysterious round.

"Done rather brown," said Stock. On which Carlton laughed aloud.

"That I should live to see the day," he cried, "on which our Mr. Stock made his first joke!"

Stock, quite unmoved by "the young master's" hilarity, turned to Mrs. Carlton, who he felt understood him best.

"What Miss calls pancakes," he said, "and what looks like bad flannel, is just packing. There's plenty about. Hun-

dreds of 'em. Keeps injins and suchlike taut and trim. Made of injin-rubber. Grease don't hurt 'em nor ile neither."

When the party returned to land, Mrs. Carlton noticed a mysterious looking blackboard.

"Why, it is like the keyboard to hotels," she said, pausing before it and perusing the numbers. "Of what use may this be, Mr. Stock?"

"Reports men. When here marks thus, each man his own number. When absent, tells tales. I am there to see and fine."

"Three hundred men all breaking and tearing and hammering asunder what perhaps thousands of others have spent skill, time, and money in putting together!" cried Mrs. Carlton, a look of wonder on her face.

"That's the way of breakers," said Stock.

"It is the way of human nature, take it altogether, I think," remarked Carlton. "Have you noticed the great bell, Pearl?" he added, pointing upwards. "It can be heard a good mile round, and summons

all our men at six in the morning and after the noonday dinner-hour."

"Talking of dinner," said Mrs. Carlton, "reminds me that I am very hungry, and so I am sure is Dora. What can we have, Hugh?"

"Lunch," said he. "*Madame est servie!*" and threw open the office-door.

On the round table was spread a tempting repast, the savour of grilled steak meeting pleasantly the hungry people who entered.







## CHAPTER XII.

### QUESTIONS.

“**Y**OU must tell me more about Mr. Stock,” said Pearl, in the evening, as she sat on her favourite foot-stool by her husband’s side. “He is a curious character, and greatly interests me.”

“Yes; he is *originale*, as the French say; and as good, true, and devoted a man as ever breathed—heart, soul, and body absolutely at the command of Messrs. Teak & Brine. He has never married, nor, as far as I can guess, fallen in love even.”

“That would be quite out of his line, I fancy,” remarked Pearl.

“Well I don’t know. To day, for the first time, he showed me what a gallant old fellow he can be when put upon his mettle. If you had a foster-sister, Mrs. Pearl, who resembled you in every particular, who knows but even now poor old Stock would come to the front? Nothing venture, nothing have, as we know. I remember the dear old Senator saying that to me one auspicious afternoon last summer.”

“You told me, dearest. But, for you, the venture was so very small.”

“Small! Not *tall*, I grant you; and yet I won quite *all* I coveted.”

There was a little happy pause—one of those contented silences that come only to people who are thoroughly attuned in thought, and need no words to convey it. Then Mrs. Carlton’s reminiscences of the day recalled Stock once again to her mind.

“Has he the entire management of that huge place, Hugh?” she asked.

“Yes. I hardly ever go there. Indeed

I often think the old fellow cares a good deal more about the progress, extension, and success of our business than anybody else does."

"Hugh, do you really mean to tell me that your mother ignores all your work?"

"*My* work! Why, child, I do next to nothing—not a tenth part of what my father did. He was as devoted to the concern as Stock is now, and had the head of the master on his strong shoulders, which our poor foreman has not. The governor slaved at it. I idle over it, and leave all to Fate and Stock. As for my lady-mother, she will know, hear, and see nothing that concerns business-matters at all. She hates the mention of the place, and has never even seen the beauties of Potiphar-lane."

"Some day, I hope, she will go there with me, Hugh, and see it all, and learn to appreciate it. No one can deny that it is most interesting to watch the weird work of destruction."

"I am getting sick of it myself," said Carlton presently. "I too begin to hate

the name and the sight of the old wood-shop. Sometimes I think I will throw it all up, and do something I care about and that interests me. If I were to go in for race-horses now! Sell off the Teak firm, and go in for being an 'owner!' Think of it! Fancy a lovely mare named after you, Pearl, winning the Oaks! Wouldn't that be fine! Sibyl Moreton was talking to me about all this the other day, picturing 'our' colours winning, until she filled me with an ambition that has taken quite a hold upon me. It must please a man to take a thorough interest in the pursuit that earns his daily bread."

"Or loses it?" said Pearl, questioningly.

"Of course it is a matter of chance to some extent; but if one has some knowledge——"

"True; knowledge is always power," said Pearl, rising, as the servant entered with the tea-tray.

Some few days after the reception of the letter from Miss Moreton, who in the politest terms accepted Mrs. Carlton's

invitation, Pearl began to question her husband on the score of Sibyl.

“I feel afraid of my visitor,” she said, “now that the time draws near for her to come to us. I fear she will get tired of our quiet country life. I think, from the tone of her letter, that she expects, when she comes to us, to enjoy all the gaieties of the London season. And what do we know of those here?”

“Not much, certainly,” answered Carlton, absently.

“Where are your thoughts, Hugh?”

“In London lodgings; wondering if it will be necessary for us to take up a temporary residence in town, for our guest’s sake.”

“Oh, Hugh, I do hope not!” said Pearl. “Perhaps she will be able to get on with us, riding and driving and gardening. It is only that I fancy from chance words of yours, and from that magnificent letter, that Miss Moreton is very grand and very fashionable. And that makes me feel at a loss as to what suitable amusement we can offer her.”

“Time will prove. Meanwhile, don’t distress yourself, you child of nature. Do you know, I am quite amused at the prospect of watching the contrast between the highly-artificial Miss Sibyl and the perfectly-simple Mrs. Pearl? It will be like a scene in a play.”

“Hubert, dear, you do not mean that I am an uncultivated rustic, like that lady in the *Unequal Match*?”

“God forbid that you should think so, my Pearl! A pearl—that is just what you are; intrinsically charming, without any filagree setting. Whereas Miss Sibyl might very well be described as a topaz, showing off resplendently in the gaslight when surrounded by golden mounting to wit, Parisian costumes.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Easter had fallen late, but the first week of May saw London refilling. Then the season might fairly be said to have commenced. The dreary shutters and drearier brown-paper linings of stately and would-be-stately town-houses were all removed. Light and brightness was welcomed again; holland covers and hangings

cast aside. Muslin and lace curtains draped with pink or blue linings, and festooned with natty bows to match, gave a life-like look to the dingy brick-and-mortar erections that constitute places, crescents, and squares. That "raree-show," the Park, was the spot on which daily-increasing crowds assembled, and testified to the general desire for the public exhibition of horses, carriages, and (though last, by no means least in the opinions of their wearers) new bonnets and dresses. But not only the ladies were anxious to display their toilettes. Men also made the cut of their coats and the fit of their gloves into objects of competition and distinction. They further vied with one another in the glossy sheen obtained upon their horses' coats, and the brilliant polish of their harness, silver or brass. In such an exhibition Major McKenzie felt himself in his proper sphere. As soon as he had ascertained that Miss Moreton had definitively settled to accept Mrs. Carlton's pressing invitation to pass the month of May at Fern-Lea, he hurried away to town himself, anxious to take up

at once a prominent position among the lazy crowd of Park votaries. As yet Sibyl was to the excitable Major as the Pole is to the needle, and he felt impelled to follow her whithersoever she might lead the way.

He had ventured to confide this fact to Mrs. Moreton, and to her he had also confessed the extraordinary timidity that kept him tongue-tied in the presence of his charmer.

“Some day, I suppose, I shall get over this odd feeling of shyness, which I certainly never experienced before,” said he deprecatingly, “and then I will speak out like a man. Meanwhile, I hope you will keep my secret with me, Mrs. Moreton, and let me await my own opportunity. I have spoken thus frankly because I wish to have the satisfaction of hearing from your lips that you, her mother, are not averse to my suit.”

Mrs. Moreton had responded with grace and urbanity. She thought the dear Major would do well to wait. On no account would she herself broach this subject to her sensitive child just at pre-



sent. Dear Sibyl had been more than usually reserved of late. Could she possibly suspect the Major's intentions?

The Major could not say. He had not wished to make them secret; nervousness only had stayed his tongue. He thought Miss Sibyl, perhaps, might have guessed.

Well, however that might be, the anxious mother further suggested it would be well to give the dear girl—time. The change to Fern-Lea would benefit and divert her. One thing was certain—she had spoken very favourably of Major McKenzie, and expressed a strong regard for him.

Whatever the inward state of Sibyl's mind might have been, there certainly was no outward indication of the warmth of her feelings towards the Major. She only saw him twice after that eventful evening at Lady Graän Basilisk's, and on neither occasion gave him more than a passive cold hand to hold in his warm clasp, and the scantiest replies to his eager questions and remarks.

“We shall soon meet in London,” said Major McKenzie, when he paid his fare-

well visit to the ladies of Glenville House. "I could not bear to go away if I did not feel sure of that. Tell me that I may come to see you at Richmond, Miss Moreton."

"That will depend on Mrs. Carlton," said she.

"She will not interfere between you and any visitor you may choose to receive, I suppose?" he asked, in a tone that threatened hostility to Mrs. Carlton.

"As her guest it will be my pleasure to conform to her wishes, of course," replied Sibyl, in her iciest tone.

"You have only to call upon Mr. Carlton, and he will introduce you to his wife," suggested Mrs. Moreton, coming to the rescue as usual, and bidding Gabriel restrain his rising temper by her warning glance.

"You always say the right thing to make a man feel easy in his mind," said the Major gratefully. "I must make a point of doing the agreeable to that stick Carlton, I suppose, on account of his wife's guest."

“ I will wish you good-bye now,” said Sibyl, rising; and having allowed him the usual privilege of clasping her unresponsive fingers, she left the room.

McKenzie turned to Mrs. Moreton with a look that said, “ Can a man endure all this and yet restrain his anger and impatience ? ”

The widow answered the look by a quasi-proverb she held in special esteem. “ Patience and perseverance overcome most obstacles,” said she.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### SIBYL'S DÉBUT AT FERN-LEA.

**M**R. AND MRS. CARLTON stood on the platform of the Station together, waiting to receive their guest. Pearl, almost shyly, took Miss Moreton's hand in hers, and looked up—a long way up—to the veiled face. The veil was thick, and dark lashes hid the eyes, but the clear white skin was visible through the lace-meshes, and the copper-coloured hair lost none of its lustre by contrast with the black-velvet rim of the coquettish hat perched daintily upon it.

“ Thank you for coming to meet me,

Mrs. Carlton," said Sibyl, in her low tone. Throughout the long drive to Richmond she scarcely spoke.

Carlton had left the ladies to go home without him.

"I shall come by the usual train," he said. "I have some business matters to attend to. I hope to find you settled as one of the family by dinner-time, Miss Moreton," he added, arranging the carriage-cover so as to protect her dress.

Mrs. Carlton, finding her attempts at conversation fail, feared her guest was fatigued, and relapsed into silence. She had never before realised the length of that drive from London to Richmond, and was not surprised at Miss Moreton's sigh and tone of relief as she exclaimed, "At last!" in answer to Pearl's announcement, "This is Fern-Lea."

"It is a pretty place; but how far from civilisation!" said Sibyl wearily.

"What could have induced you to settle out in the wilds like this, when you might be in the very centre of the best part of London?"

Pearl felt embarrassed. To her mind

the manners of this lady of fashion were hardly courteous. "Perhaps she is tired, or has some source of annoyance," thought the kind-hearted little woman, and answered simply :

"We both prefer a quiet country life, and care little for London pleasures and society; that is why we chose this for our home. Still, we are not quite 'in the wilds,' and when you wish to spend a day, or an evening, in town, it can be arranged without the slightest difficulty. May I show you to your room? We call it the Rose Room. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"A very appropriate name," said Sibyl, surveying the pretty rose-hung rose-scented chamber from within that black-lace mask which as yet she had not lifted. "I want nothing, but shall rest for an hour. Where shall I find you, Mrs. Carlton?"

"In my sanctum. Open that door opposite, please. I shall like to welcome you there. I am so proud of my pretty room; we think it the gem of the house."

"Very wise of you to choose it for

your own, then. I shall see you presently within—the gem,” said Sibyl, with a little irony in the repetition of the last word.

Pearl, feeling herself summarily dismissed, stood on the landing for a moment in puzzled thought. Miss Moreton had already closed the door of the Rose room after her hostess. This, little Dora, awaiting her opportunity, heard, and she peeped out from the sanctum opposite. Seeing Mrs. Carlton alone, she came to her, and nestled closely against her arm, as was the child's wont.

“Have you been hiding, my mousie?” said Pearl, stroking the soft yellow hair.

“I saw you both come, and I liked best to wait till you were quite alone, dear,” said Dora. “You don't like that lady,” she added suddenly, looking into Pearl's face with the wistful glance peculiar to her.

“Nonsense, child. I have scarcely seen her as yet.”

“Why did she cover up her face? I watched her walking up the path. She is so tall and so grand! I want to see

if her face matches ; but I don't want to see her at all if she is not kind to my Pearl."

"Of course, we are merely strangers at present. Surely we shall get on better when we know more of one another, for Hugh's sake and his mother's," said Pearl, with a little sigh.

She was not addressing Dora, but speaking her thoughts aloud, forgetting, as one was apt to do, what a child the sympathetic little listener was. But in spite of her tender years, Dora, taught by love, understood far more than any one gave her credit for—in her own way.

More than an hour had passed before Miss Moreton came across to "the sanctum."

"This is really very nice!" she said.

Dora, watching the tall white lady with the veiled eyes, concluded that she admired the carpet on which she was looking down. The child went forward at once, as Pearl had taught her, and offered her hand to the stranger with a polite word of greeting.

"Who is this?" asked Miss Moreton,



touching the soft bright hair that always attracted caressing fingers.

“Dora, my little adopted sister,” said Pearl.

“Nice gentle little maiden. I don’t dislike quiet old-fashioned children,” said Sibyl. “Take my advice, Mrs. Carlton—never send her to school; it spoils them all, and robs them of natural refinement and unobtrusive manners.”

“I do not wish to go—*never!*” said Dora earnestly; “and my Pearl would not send me, I am quite sure of that; for it would break my heart.”

“Foolish little maid, what have you to do with hearts? Less even than I, who may once have had one,” said Sibyl. She kept the child’s soft hand in hers, and went over to where Pearl was painting. Some lilies of the valley and a trail of ivy, carelessly placed in an opal-hued Venetian glass, were being transferred in truthful form and colour to the canvas.

“You are clever!” said Sibyl decisively. “I understand it all, though I do nothing myself—now.” Mrs. Carlton rose. “You are not to disturb yourself in the least,”

continued her guest. "If you care about making me comfortable, you will take no notice of me at all. Go on working, and please let me be lazy and at my ease in my own way; then we shall both be satisfied." With that she drew a low chair close to the embers in the grate, which had a lingering glow in them, in spite of the sun's extinguishing rays.

Thus seated, with her back to Mrs. Carlton, Sibyl looked upwards at the *Romeo and Juliet* above the mantelpiece. And soon, in spite of her avowed intention "to be lazy," she rose, and, receding a few steps, gazed at the picture in silence from a more advantageous standpoint.

"Our kind Mr. Claud painted that. Is it not beautiful?" asked Dora, coming close to the strange quiet lady, and gazing at her, instead of at the familiar picture.

Sibyl at once moved away to the window, and took up her position behind Pearl, whose busy fingers she watched absently.


"A genius painted that *Juliet*," she said presently. "Is 'our Mr. Claud' a friend of yours, Mrs. Carlton?"

"Not only a friend, but my dear

honoured master," said Pearl, warming with the pleasure of spoken recollections. "If only he were here with us now! He always helped me when I came to a standstill, and reconciled me to my work and to myself. Now I am often utterly at a loss how to get on. You said I was clever, Miss Moreton, yet I feel so helplessly ignorant myself. Now, although I know exactly what I ought to render, I am incapable of reproducing Nature's tone and shading truthfully, and there is no one to point out my faults or to assist me. I did not believe I could lose heart and courage over my best-loved work; yet at times, for want of the master's correcting touch and advice, I almost despair."

"Does Mr. Carlton know this paragon called Claud?" asked Sibyl.

"No; and that is most unfortunate. They have never met, although in Hamburg they were actually under the same roof. I know they would have been such good friends; and if only Hubert had known Mr. Morel, he would have invited him to come to us when he arrives in London."



“ He is coming, then ?”

“ Yes. He may be in England now. A dear friend of mine wrote me a long letter about Mr. Morel and his doings only last week.”

“ Is she also smitten ?”

“ Smitten !” repeated Pearl, smiling.  
“ Do you mean, does she like him ?”

“ Yes. Does your friend like him as much as you do ?”

“ No one could help *liking* him,” said Pearl simply, and without in the least suspecting the covert meaning of Sibyl’s questioning ; “ he is so good, so kind, and so handsome ; he pleases every one. But I think I may, without indiscretion, admit that Lotta more than likes him.”

\* \* \* \* \*

That very night brought confirmation of Mrs. Carlton’s words. With the last post a letter arrived from Lotta, in which she declared herself “ the most fortunate, the happiest of girls ; for,” wrote this enthusiastic German maiden in all the superlatives she could find, “ Claud, the dearest, the best, and the handsomest of men, has proposed for me. And papa,

my good, my kindest papa, has given his consent. I only want you here, my darling Pearl, to complete the circle of those I love best in the whole world. And now I must hasten to tell you that from all Hamburgers this is to be kept a profound secret. Papa and mamma both wish this. No one *here* is to know anything about it. I like it all the better so. There is to be no public betrothal until Christmas, for my beloved has to go away. On the 10th of May he will leave me, and when you get this letter he will be in London. It will be terrible to me to lose him, I love him so dearly; but I shall have a consolation in hearing about him often from you, as well as from himself. And you will try and see him very often, won't you, dear Pearl, for my sake? I could not induce him to promise to call upon you; you know his fear of intruding anywhere; and he says, as he does not know Mr. Carlton, he cannot permit himself to come and see *you*. I know better than that, but could not convince him; so I appeal to you. I want you to do me a special favour. Go with your husband

and call on my Claud at Morley's Hotel. Then, the ice once broken, I know he will be only too glad to come to you as often as you will let him. Do this, dearest Pearl, because you are my best friend."

"What a gushing little girl!" commented Carlton, having read the letter through in his turn. "As for you, Pearl, you look just as pleased as you did when we arranged that little matter of ours so satisfactorily last summer."

"I shall feel quite out in the cold presently, if there is much more of this betrothing and love-making going on about me," said Sibyl, fully aware of the fact that Pearl had secretly clasped her husband's hand under the table.

"Forgive me," said the wife, laughing and blushing; "it must seem selfish on my part to have my head so full of my friends' affairs. But I am sure if you knew the two people concerned, you would feel as much interested as we do in their welfare, and this promise of happiness in their joint future."

"It is to be regretted that I have not the pleasure of their acquaintance," re-

marked Sibyl, on which there was a momentary pause; but before the sudden silence became painful, Sibyl, in a less wearied tone, said, "All this excitement has made me feel quite thirsty. Human emotion appears to be contagious. It is certainly exhausting to the system. Can you prevail on your wife to give me another cup of tea, Mr. Carlton?"

They were in the drawing-room. One window stood widely open, but the night air was still chilly, and the logs spluttered and blazed cheerfully in the open grate. Sibyl, as usual, sat close to the fire, shading her face from the glare with a white fan. The face was as colourless as the fan. Pearl looked at her guest with an interest amounting to compassion. There was something unearthly in that pallor, she thought. Hubert's eyes followed his wife's. Sibyl felt their scrutiny, and moved slightly.

"Mrs. Carlton, I know you can do everything," she said; "will you play or sing something now? But let it be something soft and low, just as subdued as the poor pale light of the moon that lies

languishing on the carpet here, and which the cruel fire and the flaring candles are trying so hard to extinguish altogether."

Pearl played the *dolcissimo* movement of the "Moonlight Sonata," and Sibyl thanked her for "so happily answering her thoughts."

Then Pearl let her fingers wander gently on to the tenderest of the "Songs without Words." And whenever she stopped, either Hubert or Sibyl said, "Please, go on." It was pleasant to have so soothing an accompaniment to their desultory chat. Pearl herself played *con amore* always, and more especially when, as now, Hubert seemed glad to listen to her.







## CHAPTER XIV.

### BROWN BEAUTY.

**M**R. CARLTON, according to his wife's urgent entreaty, called upon Morel at his hotel on the following morning. The artist received him courteously, as was his wont towards any visitor, but with none of the warmth Carlton had been led to expect from the descriptions he had heard of Claud's genial manner. When Carlton in due course offered his congratulations on Morel's betrothal to Lotta, he was answered by a formal bow, but by no spoken word.

“Will you name your own day, and

come and dine with us at Fern-Lea?" asked Carlton, when he rose to take leave.

"I really am too unsettled at present to accept any invitation," answered Morel, with nervous hesitation. "I have just taken possession of my new studio, and am occupied all day long in arranging—"

"But a fellow must have his dinner, all the same," said Carlton, laughing good-naturedly.

He began to believe the artist was shy, perhaps a little overawed, at the thought of dining at Fern-Lea. Now Carlton was of course utterly mistaken in this opinion; but it flattered his vanity, and made him specially amiable in his demeanour. He wished to put the "young painting-fellow" at his ease, who so evidently felt overcome by the importance of the (younger) commercial aristocrat.

"Mrs. Carlton has given me orders," said he. "If you were a married man, you would know that such commands may not be lightly disregarded. And therefore I beg of you to fix a day, and save me from a scolding."

“Do you say it is Mrs. Carlton’s wish I should come?” began the other.

“Of course it is; and I warn you she intends to turn your visit to considerable account. You are to be consulted on no end of artistic subjects; you are to see all her paintings; in fact, I advise you to bring a fine stock of patience with you.”

Finally Morel named the following Thursday for his visit to Richmond.


“Why put us off for a whole week?” asked Carlton.

Morel felt his cowardice in thus delaying the evil day, but he intended ere then to find some available plea for staying away altogether from the house he longed, and yet dreaded, to enter.

“The fact is I move into my studio to-morrow,” he said, “and in a week shall have settled down to regular work. Then I shall feel that I deserve the outing you offer me.”

“My wife will want to know where the new studio is?” said Carlton, still anxious to “encourage” the artist by a show of interest.


“In Lime-walk, near Chelsea.”



“I will be sure to tell her,” Carlton said, standing on the steps of the hotel as he said his parting words. “You are such a favourite with Mrs. Carlton, and have so kindly assisted her, that I consider myself under lasting obligations to you. If at any time I am able to be of any use to you, pray command me.”

Had any one accused Carlton of assuming a tone of patronage towards “the artist,” he would have resented the insinuation of such conduct as implying “snobbism” on his part. Perhaps, after all, there was a grain of the “True-Blue snob” in Hubert’s organisation, inherited directly from Lady Caroline.

On Morel, this interview made a painful impression. He had hoped to do “a good day’s work” when he rose that morning, and now he felt unsettled, dejected, and incapacitated from using head or hand profitably. For him the old Professor’s savage tirade against “mischief-working women” was being hardly proved. And yet the origin of all Claud’s troubles was as pure a Pearl as any man could have found to enshrine in his heart of hearts. But, alas, she was not his !



Carlton made his way along Pall Mall, up Waterloo-place, and into Piccadilly. There he was stopped suddenly by the outstretched hand of Major McKenzie.

“Most fortunate, by Jove!” cried that gentleman; “the man of all others I most desired to see. I want you to come with me to Sago’s, and give me your opinion on a hack. I know what your opinion’s worth. They all look up to you. Sago considers this mare sound all round, and a good one to go. She certainly is a good one to look at.”

Had Major McKenzie racked his brains for hours he could not have hit on any other plan so likely, or, indeed, at all likely to secure Carlton’s acquiescence in the proposed companionship.

McKenzie was objectionable, very; but a visit to Sago’s with a definite purpose of purchase was a temptation not to be resisted. And with a more amiable look and smile than he had ever before bestowed on “Gabriel,” Carlton quickened his pace. The two men entered at once and eagerly into equine points of discussion.

Presently the yard—the neatest yard in

London—was reached. The flags shone with a polished whiteness; the red gravel looked as though it had but just been thrown down and rolled; the straw appeared freshly littered, and its borders were plaited with the neatest accuracy. Not only at eleven in the morning, but at all hours during the day—and these were very busy days—did Sago's yard present this spick-and-span appearance.

With a pleased smile of welcome, Sago junior, who was standing at the entrance, received his visitors.

“Yes, Sir, it is a fine day, Sir, and seasonable too,” he said, in reply to Carlton's remark. He apparently extracted his opinion from a piece of tough straw he was chewing.

Sago junior was, in his way, a remarkable man. His chief characteristic was, like that of the yard he superintended, the wondrous neatness of his appearance. On the muddiest of London's muddy days, when travellers on foot, horseback, or wheels were wont to appear splashed and disfigured by every variety of dirty decoration, Hotspur Sago, spotless and

undefiled, would walk, ride, or drive unscathed amid the pools of mud. He was a dapper little man, possessing a neat figure, small hands, and smaller feet. These latter, possibly objects of special pride to their owner, were always incased in shiny "butcher boots," that boldly defined ankle and calf and went up to the knees. It had been suggested that Hotspur Sago slept in those boots; for at whatever hour he was "wanted," whether to see a sick horse at midnight or to send off a valuable hunter at seven A.M., he was always to the fore, "booted and spurred and all."

"I met Mr. Carlton by chance," said McKenzie, "and he is good enough to say he will give me his opinion on that brown mare."

Sago consulted the straw, and after a pause asked dubiously,

"Do you want to have her out again, Sir?"

"Yes, of course," answered the Major sharply. "Have her trotted up and down. We can't judge her in the stable; and, by the Lord Harry, I'd take Mr.



Carlton's opinion before that of any man in London, yourself and all the vets included."

Thus McKenzie delivered himself in the bumptious manner that invariably gave offence. Hotspur, who had a temper, very nearly risked the loss of a customer by a sharp retort; but Carlton came pleasantly to the rescue.

"The fact is, as you know, Sago, that I owe most of my horsey knowledge to you and your brother. I've proved myself a willing disciple, I think, and with your assistance have fitted up my stable pretty tidily, eh? How is Mr. Harricote, by the bye?"

"Pretty fair, Sir, thank you. The onus of the work falls entirely on me now, as you may guess. Since that rheumatic fever of Harricote's, and having a young wife and a little family at home, of course— But here *is* the brown mare, Sir!" cried Hotspur, his tone suddenly changing from the low and deprecatory to the brightly eulogistic. "She *is* a mare! It's a pleasure to look upon her. And though I say it, I solemnly believe you



would not find her like, search all over Europe. Look at her, Sir; watch her move. See her legs—fine and clean and strong; strong as a bullock's, and as fine as a thoroughbred's. Isn't she a picture? Carry a lady, Sir? of course she would; carry a baby."

"Hard upon the baby," laughed Carlton, as the mare gave a wild bound in a vain effort to break away from the boy who was leading her.

"That's her beautiful spirit, Sir," said Hotspur, not one whit disconcerted. "You get on her back, Mr. Carlton; you'll soon find out what she is made of. There is nother like in Europe for springiness and staying power combined."

Carlton, having watched the mare up and down half a dozen times, ordered the saddle on, and, contrary to Mr. Sago's usual regulations, was allowed to take "Beauty" out of the yard. He walked her leisurely away for a turn in the Park.

"Well, he is a pretty cool hand, by Jove!" cried McKenzie. "Goes right off without a word, and leaves me here to wait his lordship's pleasure, while, for

all I know, he's knocking the mare about like——”

“Will you excuse me, Sir?” said Sago junior, cutting the Major's tirade short; “this is a lady I must attend upon myself.” He went briskly forward to meet a pretty little woman, who had just stepped from her brougham at the curb. She approached the yard, and returned Sago's bow graciously. As he turned to walk beside her, she entered into an eager explanation of the purport of her visit, to which Sago listened with much deference. He had always been known as “the lady's man” of the firm.

“I really could not wait for the Colonel,” said the lady, passing but not regarding Major McKenzie, who turned and followed her up the yard at no great distance; “I was quite too anxious to see this Beauty for myself. My husband is with the Duke, as usual, and there is no counting on his return. Of course the mare is the loveliest creature in Europe, that is understood, since she is in *your* stable, Mr. Sago;” and here the lady

smiled a fine smile. "But I am led to believe," she continued, "that there is more truth in this report than in most others. Do have her brought out at once."

"Excuse me, Sago," said McKenzie, who had made no secret of his wish to hear all the lady had to say; "is *my* brown mare in question here?"

"Then you have decided on the purchase, Sir?" asked Sago, instantly on the alert where the clinching of a bargain was concerned.

"Yes; at my figure."

"That I cannot do for you, Sir, really."

"You do not mean to say that you are disposing of *the* Brown Beauty, Mr. Sago?" asked the little lady peremptorily.

"Yes, Madam; this gentleman is desirous of possessing her. And, honestly, I cannot but admire his taste and judgment."

"Then why did you speak to Colonel Winter about her, Mr. Sago, and allow him to see her, to tell me of her perfections, and make me long to possess her

for my own riding?" said the lady, with keen reproach in her tone.

"Indeed, Madam, I am grieved that you should feel annoyed or disappointed," said Sago, very humbly. "The truth is, that when the Colonel saw her yesterday he did not seem at all inclined to purchase. He made me no offer, in fact. I have since given the refusal to Major McKenzie."

Mrs. Winter, who had always been accustomed to find her will recognised as law, looked at the Major, and her glance said, "Refuse the mare at once;" but she only *looked* her commands, and the Major felt in no sense bound to obey.

"Consider her mine, and at *your* price, Sago," he said, peremptory in his turn. "That is, on condition that Mr. Carlton brings her in without any blemishes; and I shall expect a certificate, of course."

Sago, again irritated almost beyond bearing, chewed his straw viciously, and moved a few paces on. McKenzie, with a bow, detained the lady.

"Allow me to offer you my card, Ma-

dam," said he. "Should you or the Colonel desire to open negotiations with me, you will find me always ready to serve and oblige a lady."

Mrs. Winter was *a lady*, and felt the position this swarthy stranger had placed her in painfully. But without any outward show of her dilemma, only seeming to gain a foot in height as she certainly gained two in dignity, she took the card "the odious man" offered her with the slightest bow in acknowledgment.

"I will acquaint Colonel Winter with your offer," she said; and said it so icily, that even the Major's flow of words was temporarily frozen.

At this moment Carlton, thoroughly satisfied with Beauty, and consequently in the best of tempers, rode into the yard.

Mrs. Winter knew instinctively that this was *the brown mare* she had come to see, and watched her attentively. The lady had a keen affection for, and a thorough knowledge of, horses, and quite forgot her previous annoyance in the unfeigned delight the sight of Beauty gave

her. Carlton, serenely conscious of the interest caused by the mare, and not unnaturally appropriating a little of it for himself, went through a quasi "show-off" performance, which Mrs. Winter watched critically before she walked, with lingering footsteps, out of the yard.

"That woman would give her right hand to possess this mare," said McKenzie to Carlton as the latter dismounted.

"Indeed! She did look at her with covetous eyes. Won't you give her up? She is perfection for a lady who *can* ride, I should say."

"No, by the Lord Harry, no; not if she were to offer me a clear profit of a hundred down. I remember the lady; I thought I recognised her at first. Now, I am sure. She showed some of her airs to Miss Moreton once. Now *she* shall dance with envy, while Miss Moreton rides that mare in the Row to everybody's admiration."

"Very charitable on your part. I feel quite sorry for the lady; she looked so wistfully at the Beauty. And she seemed

a jolly little woman too. I really think I should let her have the mare."

"No, you would not," said the Major promptly. "Not if you had determined to win Sibyl, and knew her as I do. These are the things that tell on those quiet undemonstrative women. This mare will do more towards thawing her than— By the by, Carlton," he cried, with sudden eagerness, "Miss Moreton is staying with you, isn't she? And I am sure you will do me a kindness, and let me come and pay my humble respects to your wife and her guest?"

"Certainly," said Carlton; not quite as eagerly as the Major had spoken. "You may as well come and dine—if you choose, that is. Here is our address. Will next Thursday at seven suit you?"

The Major was grateful, and would be delighted.

"Excuse me now," said Carlton hurriedly; "I have an appointment." And he left the yard.

So Mr. Sago got his own price for Beauty; and Major McKenzie felt that,



however dearly the mare had cost him, there was no cause for regret, for surely he had now made a decided step towards the purchase of Miss Moreton's approbation.







## CHAPTER XV.

### SIBYL LAYS A TRAIN.

**F**OR some days following his visit to Morel, Carlton remained at Fern-Lea, devoting himself to the ladies and their pleasures. Those were happy days, on which long drives were taken and long rows too, and midday picnicking superseded formal luncheons. On one occasion Sibyl volunteered to drive Dora in the village cart, if Pearl would ride with her husband. So they all started off in laughing spirits, and "raced" along the wondrous chesnut-avenue in Bushey Park, just then in flowering perfection. Sibyl adapted her-



self in her languidly-contented way to her surroundings, and, being satisfied and at ease, troubled no one.

Pearl sometimes watched her guest in thoughtful wonder. She felt a growing interest in this pale mysterious woman, who spoke so low, and moved so quietly, and who, though she rarely raised those drooping lids of hers, seemed to note all that was going on about her with keen observation.

Timid little Dora was attracted by Sibyl to an astonishing degree. For the first time since she had declared and proved her allegiance to Pearl, the child now wavered in the marks of her affection. She would sometimes steal to Sibyl's side, and kneeling at her feet, beg, by a coaxing movement, to have her wee hands clasped in those long white fingers. But to the child's advances Sibyl did not respond, neither did she check the unobtrusive proofs of admiration. As usual, her part was an entirely passive one.


To this indifference there was but one exception. In her conversation with Carlton she thawed a little; to him she

spoke and listened with some interest. He was delighted by her ready wit, and appreciated her sarcastic remarks about her own life and her social relations. To these Sibyl was wont to allude with concentrated bitterness, and her speech, as she ridiculed society and the position she held in it, painted in poignant colours the hateful barrenness of her existence.

It has been said before that Carlton was still very young and inexperienced in the world and its ways, and that he really knew nothing of the ladies of society, of whom Sibyl now stood to him as the admirable representative. Her trenchant speech; her invidious remarks on men, women, and manners; her unhesitating repetition of, and comments on, the scandals of the day (of all of which she seemed to have learnt the minutest details),—shocked and yet delighted him. He would on no account have allowed his Pearl to hear such stories or allusions; but to have them told to him in that languid voice, to watch the fine smile with which “points” were dwelt on, and to listen to the well-chosen words that

robbed coarse meanings of their sting, was to Carlton a novel and a fascinating experience. And not only of men and women could Sibyl talk cleverly and impart her opinion and judgment. She understood horses too, knew and could dwell on their points, and came back again and again to the theme she and Carlton had discussed by the fireside at Hastings. Indeed, on one occasion, she told Hubert plainly that she should not be satisfied with him, or consider him worthy of the great interest she felt in him, until he became an owner of racehorses and a distinguished member of the Jockey Club.

“It is not easy,” she said, “but it will suit you. You must make a name for yourself. If I were your wife, I could do it all for you. As it is, you shall have my assistance, and that promise is worth more than you have any idea of at present. I like you; I take an interest in you, and I have determined that you shall distinguish yourself. I know all about your old broken ships, and disapprove entirely. Many people know that great secret, and it militates against your social position.



You have made money by it—now cut the business. It has served as means to an end. Keep a share in it if you so choose, but let no one have the power to couple your name with—old logs. The association is unworthy. You have a good presence, and can command a position ; but rusty anchors cannot fail to drag you down to the level of—*tradesmen !*”

With ineffable scorn that obnoxious word was pronounced, and for the first time it struck Carlton himself as undesirable—indeed, as odious.

This conversation was carried on as the two walked up and down the broad gravel-path together, waiting for Mrs. Carlton, who had promised to join them and go on the river with them so soon as certain household matters had been attended to by her.

Little Dora was walking beside Sibyl, clinging closely to the unresponsive hand, and listening attentively to words of which she was unable to grasp the full meaning. But when she heard the “broken ships” so slightly spoken of, she at once prepared herself to do battle

on a subject "her" Pearl had commended.

But before the timid voice could make itself heard, a new topic suggested itself to Carlton, which he was sure would change the strong current that had set in against his "business," and would for the time help him to withstand those harsh comments which he already felt were strongly influencing him against his better judgment.

"I met an admirer of yours on Thursday," said he; and told the story of Sago's Yard, Brown Beauty, and Mrs. Winter, which he had purposely reserved for an opportunity when he should be alone with Sibyl, and able to give her his opinion on the attentions of her swarthy suitor.

"And he actually bought the mare at the dealer's price?" asked Sibyl, having listened attentively.

"Yes, *mirabile dictu!* And you will have to ride her now to prove your gratitude."

"I don't know about gratitude," said she, reflectingly. "No doubt the Major

had his reasons for making the purchase, and will endeavour to get himself rewarded, after his own fashion. As to riding the mare, I have not ridden since I left India; still, that I may do, if I should feel inclined for prodigious exertion. Perhaps Mrs. Carlton will be good enough to try this Beauty for me. After her performance on that spitfire Kitty, surely no animal could come amiss to her. You certainly are a most fortunate man in having such a wife. I am daily discovering some new accomplishment of hers."

"Pearl is wiser and more good and more clever than anybody else in the whole world!" said Dora giving her evidence *con amore*.


"Go and see if you can help her, little one," said Carlton; "she seems a long time coming out." And when the child had gone, Carlton asked, in a suddenly serious tone, "Is it possible that you intend to accept that mare as a present from McKenzie?"

"Dear me! This sounds most ominous and grave! Unfortunately I cannot answer with a corresponding amount of

solemnity," said Sibyl, with a mocking smile. "I hardly know what I should do with the mare, unless I accept the purchaser also. Then stabling and groom would follow as a natural sequence."

"You surely do not mean to tell me that you would give yourself to that—to Gabriel McKenzie?" Carlton swallowed the strong adjective, but the very name of "the nigger" seemed almost to choke him. With a tone of the most perfect indifference, Sibyl replied,

"No, not *give* myself. But he may find it convenient to make comparatively a higher bid for me than he did for that pretty bribe, the mare; and it may suit me to sell myself for an extravagant sum. Now pray do not try to be conventional or impulsive, Mr. Carlton. Neither suits you in the least. Keep to the *juste milieu*. Think of the reasonableness of the thing, and don't look or pretend to feel shocked. That is unnecessary; you understand me too well. I told you the other evening that money, dress, carriages, luxuries, are essential to my existence. Life cannot be worth having to me without them.






How they are obtained is a secondary consideration."

She had spoken in her usual low tone, but the last words were pronounced with the utmost decision. It would be difficult to analyse the contradictory thoughts that filled Carlton's mind as he listened to this self-possessed unscrupulous, and yet to him most fascinating woman. Perhaps the strongest impulse within him at the moment was to save her, no matter at what cost, from so basely sacrificing herself. He might even have put this mad desire into words, had not his wife's voice recalled him to his calmer self. He crunched rebellious thoughts and quixotic impulses deep down into the gravel with an angry heel, and turned to meet Pearl, who came up to Sibyl with pretty words of apology for having kept her waiting so long.

Pearl's presence and musical voice soothed Hubert, as did the confiding touch of the hand she laid upon his arm. By the time the river was reached, he had almost forgotten that he had been mentally "rubbed the wrong way," and was



as ready as his energetic little wife to take an oar. They pulled cheerfully away towards Eel-pie Island.

Sibyl lay back against the dark-blue cushions, and Dora, finding a cosy seat in the bottom of the boat, leant her head contentedly against Sibyl's knees, and as the child listened to the washing of the water, she closed her eyes and told herself the wonderful legends Felix had so often repeated to her of the beautiful fair Loreley, who sat on the black rock, and with a golden comb combed golden tresses, and singing, lured unwary boatmen to destruction. Loreley, she thought, must have been just like Sibyl; but Sibyl did not sing, nor would she ever be cruel like the Loreley.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the morning following this boating expedition, Carlton went to town "on business." He had spent some sleepless hours during the past night, harassing himself cruelly with the perpetual repetition of Sibyl's taunting words. So people knew of his "broken ships," and the way in which he earned his money was con-

sidered derogatory to his social position! *Who could have told her?* Was that fact of the old logs generally known among Lady Caroline's friends? Was it on that account she had a difficulty in keeping up her acquaintance among "the set"—to be one of which was her great aim in life? She had a greater, and that was the acquisition of money; but that was never mentioned, although her son knew it full well, and others guessed it too. Are not our weaknesses and faults always better known and more canvassed by our most intimate friends than the virtues we ourselves hope we possess?

Sibyl's knowledge of the nature of Carlton's business had been easily acquired. She had been instructed by Mrs. Moreton to ascertain the source of Lady Caroline's income from McKenzie, who had refused to give this information to the widow on the occasion of his first visit to Glenville House. Sibyl ascertained the simple fact of the Teak & Brine firm on the evening of Lady Basilisk's ball, as easily as she would have learnt any other secret she might have chosen to ask from Gabriel on

the night of his triumph. For that one evening he had felt as though he really had some claim on the Lily-Lady, who the next morning chilled him again by her cold reception and the quiet disdain with which she treated his advances.

It was with a troubled mind that Carlton went away to town. Mr. Stock had written to beg his principal for a necessary interview, and Mr. Stock's news was not pleasant, nor were his reports as favourable as usual regarding the state of the yard. There had been trouble with the workmen; some among them had seceded, tempted by the promise of higher wages and easier hours from a neighbouring firm inclined to speculative enterprises. Disunion and dissatisfaction having once entered the Teak & Brine camp, further difficulties arose, and were likely to continue, to trouble the peace of masters and men for some time to come.

"D—n it!" cried Carlton angrily, having heard Mr. Stock's very plain statement of these disagreeable facts. "Upon my word, it's enough to tempt one to cut the whole affair, and shut up the place

right away. How will the men like that? A set of grumbling idiots!"

"They mayn't like that, Sir," said Stock; "but you and my lady will like it less. *They'll* get other work and other pay; but *your* pay will stop with their work."

"And all this has arisen within this last week?" resumed Carlton, after a pause.

"Yes, Sir. Come down and speak to the men yourself. That will do good."

"I should blow them up all round."

"No matter, Sir. As long as you show yourself, they'll be more like to knock under. The right word 'll come to your lips at the right time. And even if you were to give in just a half an inch—"

"Not I; they'll want an ell at once."

"Try it, Sir."

"I must think it over, Stock."

"Thinking wastes time. Come down and speak, Sir."

"Perhaps I will to-morrow."

"I wish you would say for certain and to-day, Sir."

"I can't, and would not if I could."

After this ungracious speech, Stock simply asked,

“Any further commands?” and being told “No!” put on his hat and went his silent way, with a heavier heart in his honest breast than had beat there for many a long year.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ladies at Fern-Lea were sitting in “the sanctum” when Carlton had gone to meet Mr. Stock in town. Pearl was painting, and her guest was seated opposite Morel’s picture, which seemed to attract her furtive glances oftener than any other object in the house.

“Have you ordered the carriage, Mrs. Carlton, and for what time?” asked Sibyl.

“Three o’clock, if that suits you.”

“And you purpose going—”

“Wherever you please. I had thought of asking you to call at—”

“People’s houses about here? Oh, no. That would be too gruesome. I hate visits of show and ceremony. So do you, for a different reason. You are far too natural and simple to enjoy that kind of polite farce, and I am—well, I have seen too much of it, *voilà tout*. Say an hour

earlier for the carriage, and let us go on an expedition; find out Lime-walk and look this wonderful artist up in his new studio."

"Mr. Morel!" cried Pearl, much astonished by this startling proposal. "Oh, I should not like to go without asking Hubert. I never do anything unless I have consulted him."

"Child! what an odd child you really are! Well, *I* certainly have no one to consult, and have quite determined to go. You will not send me off alone, will you?"

With considerable dash and prancing on the part of the horses, Mrs. Carlton's carriage drew up before the freshly-grained door of No. 1 Studio, Lime-walk. The "walk" was well named; it consisted of a broad avenue of sweet-scented limes, that turned out of one of the dirtiest and noisiest thoroughfares of the populous district now politely called S.W. Once in the avenue, to which there was "No Thoroughfare," you might have been fifty miles away from London, so restful was this nook. Even the birds mistook it for a country residence, and amid endless fluttering and chirping, were settling themselves here for the coming summer.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN LIME-WALK.

**T**HE twelve commodious studios in Lime-walk had lately been erected by an enterprising contractor, who had purchased the land. The avenue had once formed the approach to a fine old manor-house built in the time of good Queen Anne. The house, by the contractor's orders, was pulled down, and with its old bricks all the wild tangle of clematis, jasmine, and honeysuckle, that had once so sweetly scented the garden, was torn away, and carried off too; and on the site that had served for the stately promenading of be-



wigged and powdered dames and knights long ago, twelve studios with all modern improvements were erected. In them worked artists of these latter days; and some among them strove, more or less successfully, to give on canvas, reproductions of the brocade, the starch, and stateliness of the spurred and booted cavaliers, and the high-heeled slippered ladies, who had once clanked or tripped over the boards and pathways now symmetrically covered by modern planking.

No. 1 had been completed just six months, and was by far the most commodious of the dozen. It had the advantage of two entrances, the principal one opening straight out into the avenue, and the other into the long stone corridor on which the eleven abutted.

Morel was a fortunate man. He was earnestly devoted to his profession; yet had no absolute need of it for the earning of his daily bread. He lived to work, but had not to work to live. Being the only child of parents who had money, he inherited a sufficient sum to make life's possibilities wear a very pleasant aspect to

him without any exertion on his part, and to enable him to devote his time, from his youth upwards, to the cultivation of the talent that had come to him as a birth-right, and was as evident as the handsome face and gentle nature with which his young mother had endowed him.

With the utmost eagerness Claud had looked forward to the arrangement of this new studio. In all his travels, he had the future decoration of such a home in view, and therefore had carefully sought for and collected armour, tapestry, antiquated cabinets, silken hangings, stamped leather, and costumes of the most picturesque periods.

At last he had found a resting-place for all his treasures, but content and pleasure alike had vanished from his life; and with a heavy heart, and in a most despondent mood, he began to settle himself in this hitherto-so-much-desired artistic home. The actual arrangement of his possessions gave him abundant occupation for some days, and left him little time for thought. To allow himself no idle hour, he had resolved to commence the new

week with regular work. For this purpose he had engaged a model, and really concentrated his attention throughout the Monday morning on the picture originally intended for the exhibition of the year, but which, owing to the utter change unsuspecting Pearl had made in Morel's plans and life, had hitherto been utterly neglected. He had been working steadily all the morning, but with the half-hour's interval for luncheon an idle fit possessed him, and he felt he could do no more good that day. So he dismissed the model, and having smoked a pipe, without deriving his usual solace from its fumes, knocked out the ashes in disgust, and flung himself full length upon the quaint old sofa, whose gilt frame consisted of crowns and cupids and lilies, while Watteau groups disported themselves, in paling colours, upon the faded-satin cushions.

Poor Claud ! Very perplexing thoughts were filling his mind and drawing deep furrows across the broad brow hitherto uncrinkled by aught but laughter or the momentary anxieties caused by a divided

opinion as to his work. But now a grave question had arisen, and conflicting thoughts tormented him concerning one all-engrossing subject—Pearl.

How could he withstand the fearful temptation to see her again? And how should he bear the sight of her in another man's home—as another man's wife? Could he stay away without giving offence to her, who had always treated him with such kind courtesy? And would he not seriously annoy that poor, trusting, rosy-cheeked child over the water by absenting himself from the house of “her best friend?” Surely it would be right on his part to refrain from such perilous interviews. Had not his weakness already brought him into sad trouble? Why had he been led on to take that undesirable, that fatal step at Hamburg? Delroy was to blame for that. Delroy had harped on Lotta's evident affection for Claud, until Claud, moved to compassion for the girl, had gone to her father and asked for his consent.

His consent to what? To Claud's life-long bondage to good little Lotta, for

whom he felt a certain liking and some compassion, but neither sympathy nor love. Had he not engaged himself, how much easier would his course be now! If he were free, his own master, he would certainly stay away from Pearl, heedless of consequences. But if he now absented himself, Lotta would wonder, and Lotta might begin to suspect! Already that subtlest of all teachers, Love, had given the girl an insight into Claud's thoughts and feelings, which formerly were as a sealed book to her. His sudden and inexplicable departure from the dance on the 21st of December had recurred to her a dozen times since, and she had often tried to account for it, now that she knew "him" better. She had even cross-questioned "him" in wary feminine fashion, but without obtaining any solution of what seemed likely to remain a lasting mystery. Lotta must be saved any uneasiness, she should not endure a moment's anxiety, so argued this plausible sophist, as he lay "thinking matters over" on the old sofa in his studio. And satisfied that he had resolved on the right

course now, he determined to follow it unflinchingly, no matter at what cost to his feelings. He would go bravely to Fern-Lea, and he would confront Mrs. Carlton's steady eyes; he would even teach himself to speak to her, if such must be, of his betrothal to her friend. And then Claud became fierce and angry with his changing thoughts, and rising from the sofa paced the studio hastily. Was he not man enough to cure himself of this infatuation, this folly! It had come upon him as a curse, it was blighting his life, and killing his power—nay, his very wish—to work. And yet when he had first known Pearl he had thought and hoped—

His sweet-bitter recollections brought back a whole train of agonising memories. Anger died out, and he flung himself down again with a groan. For *her* his feeling was all tenderness, and utterly void of reproach; he had not even the satisfaction of being able to blame her for the misery she had brought upon him. He had misunderstood her from first to last; that he knew well enough now: she had never

sought to deceive him. He had been wilfully blind; but she had not misled him. This spared him pain in one sense, while in another it added to his poignant misery. It would have been as a safety-valve to his distress if he could have indulged in some righteous upbraiding of her, who, as far as he was concerned, was certainly beyond fear and beyond reproach. She haunted him so—that was the hardest of his trials. She seemed ever present to him. Even now he saw her as he had so often seen: her neat head bent over her work, her busy fingers obeying the clear glance of her eyes—those wondrous gray eyes sometimes laughing and bright to transparency then again, if deepened by inner emotion, dreamy, shadowy, dark. If trouble or anger should ever come to Pearl, those eyes might look black and stormy as night. Claud hoped fervently that it would never be his fate to dim their brightness by even a passing cloud.

Some such form had his wandering thoughts taken when he was abruptly summoned back to his immediate sur-

roundings by a rapid knock at the outer door of the studio. Who could have found out his retreat so soon? Who had come to disturb, to bother him? The thought of inquisitive prying visitors was positively hateful. His model had been dismissed for the day; he expected no one. If he kept still, no one could know he was there. The knock was repeated, hurriedly and timidly. A woman! He did not want to see any woman. Let her or them knock on, he would not answer.

For the third time the knock was repeated, but with decision and authority, as by one who would not be denied. And straightway Claud, without any reason for changing his inhospitable intention, went to the door and opened it. That thoughtful preoccupied frown that looked like vexation was still on his brow. One minute before Pearl had been present to Claud's mental vision, and yet she was the very last person he expected to behold with his actual eyes.

As she now stood before him on his own doorstep, he had the greatest diffi-



culty in suppressing the exclamation that rushed to his lips. He stifled the sound, indeed, he spoke not one word, but the colour fled from his face in an instant, and it was into a very trembling hand he took her ready little fingers.

Morel, as was his wont, had been working in his shirt-sleeves. There was not even the traditional stained-velvet coat to hide the blue-striped cambric, nor did any gorgeously-embroidered cap cover the wavy luxuriance of his hair. His feet were very much at ease in ancient canvas shoes; indeed nothing less like the conventional or theatrical artist *poseur* could be imagined than Claud, as he stood speechless on the threshold of his studio. For a minute he was too much bewildered to ask his visitors in.

Sibyl saw it all. His sudden pallor, the confusion in which her presence had not even been noticed, nothing escaped her. But she was far more impressed by the physical beauty of the man who stood there trembling than by that secret of his

which she had detected in her first surreptitious glance at him.

Morel never knew how they all got back, through the dim corridor and quaintly-furnished ante-room, into the lofty studio. But there the keen light of day shone on all three faces, and brought a fierce rush of colour to Claud's brow and cheeks, rousing him to a sudden sense of his remissness, and filling him with a desire to show all possible attention to his visitors.

"He is as pliable and as sensitive—more sensitive than any woman," thought Sibyl, watching his nervous manner, his fine smile, and listening to the pleasant tones of his voice. She keenly noted everything, and was amused by the simplicity of Pearl, who all-unconscious of the emotion she had caused, felt some anxiety as to whether Mr. Morel "minded" being visited in this unceremonious fashion. Pearl was really disturbed by Morel's manner, which did not seem to her as frank and cordial as of old, and timidly she uttered some words of apology for the "intrusion." To these Claud responded

with so earnest an assurance of the delight he felt in welcoming her once again, and under his own roof, that she soon was perfectly at ease, and presently they were engrossed by the old familiar artist's talk. Pearl eagerly enough told of her work, her striving and her difficulties, and, led on by his questions and comments, confessed also how anxious she was for his advice and assistance. Then she spoke of his picture, now her property, and how it was appreciated; and Sibyl, approaching, joined in with warm words of praise. Sibyl's presence had for the time been entirely forgotten by the other two, and Pearl started almost guiltily as she realised her want of attention to Miss Moreton. But that lady was not in the least offended. She had found plenty to amuse her in the albums on the tables, and in the sketches upon the walls. She had also critically examined the picture on the easel just commenced, and added her word of comment on that to her praises of the Romeo at Fern-Lea. As she spoke, Morel looked at her for the first time, and his artist's eyes dwelt with wonder on the extraordinary

colour of her hair and the whiteness of her skin.

As he looked at her, he also became possessed of a sudden curiosity to see the eyes hidden beneath those darkly-fringed lids that had so often frustrated the inquiring glances of men. He took up a sketch and held it at arm's length for Miss Moreton's inspection. She answered his questions readily, but no responsive glance met his inquiring look. Perceiving that she chose to hide her eyes, he at once gave up the attempt to penetrate what the lady desired to keep secret. His thoughts were far too much engrossed by one woman to be diverted by more than passing curiosity to any other.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CHARMER CHARMED.

**R**EARL felt herself thoroughly at home amid the Bohemian *entourage*, always congenial to the truly artistic mind. She fingered the glorious old brocades and the gold-and-silver tissues lavishly displayed. She held the rich folds of tender-hued satins at arm's length to admire the shades that varied with every slight change of light, then laid the soft fabric against her cheek, the better to feel its glossy richness. She even put the toe of her boot into a wondrous old Louis Quinze shoe, and, delighted, watched



the sparkling of the great paste buckle. Then she in her turn stood before the large canvas, on which a church interior was getting itself traced in bold architectural lines; and even ventured to comment on certain distances and on the position of the central figure, the very one for which the model had posed that morning. Poor Claud, watching and listening to this sweet woman, over whom an undefinable change, a certain assurance, had come, which in the girl had been wanting, felt that he loved her as much, or, alas, more than ever! On the heels of that discovery came a sudden resolution, more likely to be kept than others as hastily made; for this one was in perfect consonance with the maker's own desires, and was to the effect that he, Claud, would take every available opportunity of seeing and being with Pearl. Lotta had especially entreated him to do so; Pearl herself had just told him how much she needed his help and advice; why should he do violence to his own feelings by staying away? Did not duty clearly bid him go?

To look at her, to listen to her voice

was all he needed to make him comparatively happy. *She* should never suspect him of any deeper feeling than the interest and friendship he had shown to her in those happy Hamburg days, when she was his obedient pupil and he her privileged master. Thus Claud made a pact with his conscience, and, thinking duty and pleasure might safely go hand in hand along this dangerous precipice, abandoned himself to the full enjoyment of the present, and was content to think the future might be left to take care of itself.

In his conviction that Pearl suspected him of no deeper feeling than that of interested friendship where she was concerned, Claud was right. It never occurred to him either that lookers-on see most of the game, and that the pale reserved lady, with that wonderfully lustrous hair, had penetrated his heart's secret, and knew the story of his unrequited love just as thoroughly as if he had begged her to receive his confidence, and told the bitter truth of his mad passion to her *vivâ voce*.

Yes, Sibyl knew it all, and knew also that she had this day seen the handsomest and the most charming man she had ever met with. He was a genius, original, unconventional. *He* could never be made into "a man of the world," such as Carlton under her tutelage promised soon to become. No; society would never change Morel; but *tant mieux*: she should desire no change in him, save in one matter, and that might soon be accomplished if she set herself the task.

This poor man was blindly infatuated, that was evident; and his interest must be diverted, and speedily, from its utterly unresponsive object. It seemed scarcely credible that Pearl, who evidently was quite incapable of appreciating him, should continue to occupy Morel's thought, attention, ay, and manifest admiration. To Sibyl the prospect of distracting his mistaken ideas seemed a very pleasant one, nor did she anticipate the slightest difficulty in the congenial task. She had been courted and sought persistently hitherto; there was something novel and attractive in the idea of reversing this



wearisome order of things. Prompt to act where inclination led, Sibyl opened the proposed campaign at once.

“Do you know I brought Mrs. Carlton here quite against her will to-day, Mr. Morel?” she said in that low tone of hers that *sounded caressing*, if she liked the person she addressed. “Mrs. Carlton had calls to make in Richmond, and shopping to do, and a host of other *most important* things. But I, having seen and fallen desperately in love with your Romeo, could not rest without coming to see your studio—and you. So I carried my hostess off, utterly regardless of her objections.”

“I am sorry Mrs.—Mrs. Carlton”—it was the first time he used the obnoxious name in her presence—“should have so strangely objected to coming to see me,” said Morel, evidently aggrieved.

“Oh, you most guileless of men!” thought Sibyl, and smiling, said, “It was only an instance of her usual rectitude. She is so good, you know, and I am so naughty. That you did *not* know. The formal visits were duties; to come to you,

pleasure. With Mrs. Carlton, duty is always paramount; while I invariably pursue the easier path. You, I should imagine, endeavour to combine the two. Are you successful as a rule?"

"In what way?" he asked absently. His thoughts were following Pearl, who had gone on into the anteroom, and was critically examining a book of sketches. He longed to go to her, and explain the subjects she was scrutinising, but Sibyl, seeing his intention, frustrated it.

"I am thankful to find you are not so overwhelmed with work as we expected to find you," she said. "I want to make a proposition to you, for which you ought to be very grateful. I am staying in town for a month, and shall be glad to offer myself as a model to you, if you can make use of me. I am quite *au fait* in the duties of a *poseuse*; I have sat before, often, and I know there is some special attraction about the colour of my hair. It is no merit of mine; but the fact exists and I am proud of it. We women like to be distinguished, even if only for a typical shade of colour. I have had my hair

coveted to an alarming extent, and envious women have tried to get a dye to match. As if any dye could match this!" As she spoke, she lifted the velvet hat, and unwinding a part of the great coil of hair, let it fall in its glittering beauty over her shoulder.

Morel felt that he would like to touch the tress as it curled invitingly.

"It is marvellous," he said, in genuine admiration.

"Thanks for the tribute. Would you like to paint it?"

"I should like to try."

"That chance shall be yours. Let us conclude preliminaries at once. If I sit to your satisfaction, will you reward me with a small sketch?"

"You have only to command, of course."

"You may fix your own day, and *I will get Mrs. Carlton to bring me,*" said Sibyl pointedly, as she rearranged her hair and put on her hat.

Morel, having duly noted and been wonderfully elated by her last words, thanked her in a manner she afterwards stigmatised as "quite gushing."

"Mrs. Carlton, are you ready?" asked Sibyl, going into the anteroom, and added, "We had better have a drive in the Park, as we are so near."

"As you please," said Pearl; "I shall like it, of course."

Then Sibyl turned towards Morel.

"We want you to come for a drive with us, now at once. You have been very civil, and you shall be rewarded. We will give you ten minutes in which to put on your go-to-meeting coat, and we shall have much pleasure in securing you as a *vis-à-vis* in the landau. Don't hesitate, Mr. Morel; you have nothing particular to do, and an outing on so glorious a day must be refreshing to mind and body."

He looked at Pearl and awaited her commands.

"Do come," she said. "It is our first regulation drive, and you can tell us who the people are."

Sibyl looked forward to seeing "the handsome genius in the garb of civilisation," she told Pearl. But when Morel rejoined them, Sibyl felt disappointed. The orthodox blue-black coat, the tall

hat, and lacquered boots, though in the best taste, did not seem to suit the man whose chief attraction lay in his unconventional manner and in his natural beauty.

The hour was four, the day bright and soft, the air laden with the climax of perfumes that greets our eagerly dilated nostrils, when Spring is at its warmest height. People said, and said truly that "the Park was looking lovely." The weather had been unusually mild, and trees, flowers, and shrubs were blooming luxuriantly. Tulips, vain and flaunting displayed their gorgeous colour by the side of modest hyacinths, whose time for show was almost over. Deep-hued refined carnations glowed near common place wallflowers, both combining to scent the air in sweet harmony. It seemed to Mrs. Carlton as if all London was in the streets, and then as if the Upper Ten of England had suddenly congregated in the Park.

"We ought to have brought Swift out instead of sending him off with Dora," said Pearl uneasily. "I see that all the people have two servants on the box, and

Hubert is vexed if I do not do things properly. I fear we ought not to have come into the Park like this."

"Is she not delicious with her naïveté and her utter dependance on the approval of her lord and master?" Sibyl asked confidentially of Morel. He cleared his throat but said nothing. What can men say when women choose to appeal to them about a third person who is present at the time? His awkward silence mattered nothing to Sibyl, she wished for no reply. She liked to note the man's sensitiveness. It pleased her to see him wince at the allusion to Pearl's "master." As long as Sybil could play on the strings of a human instrument, she was satisfied. If the chord struck was pleasure or pain mattered little, so that it was by her will the responsive sound was drawn forth.

"Tell Gates to draw up at the side, there is a capital place just vacated. We will look about a while," said Sibyl, having watched for the opportunity. She was immediately obeyed; the carriage safely steered into a good position at the end of the drive and near the Row. Here

the riders, drawn up in irregular line, surveyed the general show from their saddles.

“What a beautiful creature!” cried Pearl, watching the movements of the brown mare lately in Sago’s yard. “And what a queer little black-headed man is riding her. He is looking very hard at us. Why—oh! Miss Moreton, I beg your pardon, I had not the least idea you knew the gentleman.”

“Pray don’t apologise to me for laughing at the swarthy little Major,” said Miss Moreton smiling, “I quite agree with you, he is grotesque in a way peculiar to negroes and monkeys. Ah! he is coming to speak to us. He is a friend of Lady Caroline’s and of your husband’s. I must introduce him to you, I suppose? He will probably graze the mare’s shoulder against somebody’s wheels if he insists on showing her off so. But that is his affair.”

The mare ambled and pranced, and after some little delay was induced to allow herself to be wedged in between the rows of carriages drawn up beside the path.

Major McKenzie then greeted the ladies with the utmost *empressement*, and ex-

pressed his delight at being permitted to make Mrs. Carlton's acquaintance. He immediately thanked her for her "very kind invitation" to dinner, of which she knew nothing, although she responded quite as graciously as any woman of the world.

There are social instincts natural to one who is a lady in feeling, that serve as efficiently as years of mundane schooling.

"Have you heard about this mare, Miss Moreton?" asked Gabriel presently. "This is Brown Beauty; Mrs. Winter would give her right hand to possess her." He had noted with satisfaction the attention both ladies had bestowed upon his mount.

"I do not think Mrs. Winter would give one of her hands or even a little finger," said Sybil, "she is far too proud of the only pretty thing she possesses. Still, I am glad as she had such a wish, that it was defeated and—by you."

The last two words were whispered, but he for whose ears they were intended heard them with exultation.



Meanwhile Mrs. Carlton and Morel were commenting on the ever moving crowd, and not in the least interested in the conversation going on between Sibyl and her would-be lover.

But this was an undesirable state of things. Sibyl was by no means willing to allow Morel to forget her presence, and soon wearied of the compliments jerked, (thanks to the mare's restlessness) from the lips of Gabriel, in that unpleasantly husky voice of his. To attract Pearl and attract her attention was the only way to secure Morel's ear, so to Pearl Sibyl turned, asking,

"Would you like to ride this Brown Beauty? She would carry you splendidly. Major McKenzie has Mr. Carlton's leave and means to send her down to Fern-Lea to-morrow. I have half promised to ride her myself, but I would be afraid to do so until I know if she will carry a habit. She looks mischievous, don't you think?"

"*You* surely will not try a new horse for the first time with a habit?" asked Claud, anxiously.

He spoke with that sudden feeling of

fear that possesses a tender-hearted man, who thinks the woman he loves is about to incur danger.

“I do not mind trying, if my husband says I may,” said Pearl; and as she spoke her face brightened with a tender smile, and she stretched out her hand and laid it into that of Carlton, who came up to the carriage at the moment.

“Speak of an angel, eh, my Pearl?” said he, smiling too, and evidently pleased at this unexpected rencontre. “What in the name of wonder brought you to London to-day, and without giving me a hint of your plans? And, Pearl,” this in a suddenly altered tone, “how is it you came into the Park without Swift?”

Pearl looked appealingly at Sibyl, who immediately took the blame on herself, and further diverted the current of Carlton’s displeasure by asking his permission to have Brown Beauty sent into his stable. This, of course, was readily granted; and Pearl told she should ride the mare on the following day.

As soon as Carlton had appeared on the scene, Morel left the carriage and took up

a position by its side and that of "the master," who said a friendly word of greeting and then forgot all about his presence. It was only as Claud wished Mrs. Carlton goodbye, that Sibyl once more interfered on his behalf.

"Do ask the poor man to dinner, Mrs. Carlton," she said, "we have upset all his plans to-day, and really should volunteer to give him a little refreshment."

The poor man did not hear the whispered petition, but Carlton did, and, at once, hospitably obeyed it. But, Claud, suddenly brought from his haven of peace by the unexpected appearance of "the lord and master," had withdrawn entirely into his shell of reserve. From this, neither the pleading voice of Sibyl, or the courteous words of invitation Pearl added to her husband's, had power again to draw him forth. With some hurried words of thanks and adieu, he walked away; and Major McKenzie, watching his departure, felt that *he*, on Beauty, had quite eclipsed that artist fellow whom the ladies had chosen to patronize before he—the Major—rode up. He was the more sur-

prised then to hear Sibyl say in an impatient tone.

“ Do pray get in, Mr. Carlton, and let us hurry away from these noisy people.” And with only the coolest nod from his charmer to console him, poor Gabriel suddenly found himself alone in the crowd. The carriage had driven away, and a policeman, “ clearing the course” for royalty, politely suggested to the Major “ to move on, Sir, and quick.”





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SIBYL HAS HER WAY.

**Q**UIN the following morning, Brown Beauty arrived at Fern-Lea, and that same afternoon Mrs. Carlton tried the mare, and found her fidgetty, resenting the habit a little, but quite without vice, springy and pleasant in her paces, and after a while, "as tractable as a Christian," to borrow the groom's comment.

"If you will ride her every day for a week, I don't mind trying her at the end," Sibyl said; and when the Major arrived on Thursday, repeated her intention to him.

"You will let me be present then, surely?" he asked eagerly.


"*Cela dépend!*" she answered oracularly, and could not be induced to make any appointment.

McKenzie arrived in good time, and then came the other lady. "A local one," Sibyl called her, who was required to make the number of the guests even. But the clock had struck seven before Mr. Morel appeared. In alternate fits of impatience and morbid fear of arriving too early at Fern-Lea, he had put off the hour of starting so long, that when at last he entered the swinging gate of *her* house, he had been waited for. Coming last, with the consciousness of being late, is in itself unpleasant to a sensitive man, and added tenfold to Morel's nervousness when he walked into Mrs. Carlton's drawing-room.

"How late you are," she said reprovingly, "and you have lost the chance of seeing *my* studio or the garden! Miss Moreton and I expected you at five. She said she had told you to come at that hour."

Sibyl contented herself with one word of greeting: "Truant!" she said, giving Morel her hand; then turned back again towards McKenzie, with whom she had stood conversing in the deep embrasure of the bow window. She knew that her opportunity for a lengthened talk with the man to whom she had given all her pleasantest thoughts and her undivided admiration, since first she met him three days ago, would soon come, for Morel would take her into dinner. To secure peace for herself during that coming hour was now her endeavour, and to that end she was instructing the obedient Gabriel.

"I am very anxious you should make a favourable impression on Mrs. Carlton," she whispered. "She is a good, simple, little woman, but excessively touchy. Not being quite secure as to her present social position, she is the more tenacious and exacting. She will require your undivided attention to keep her in a good temper. If she finds you inclined to honour me with any polite speeches or other civilities, this will certainly be your last appearance at Fern-Lea. You will



do your best to please our hostess *for my sake*, will you not?"

"By the Lord Harry," said he fervently, "there is literally nothing on the face of the earth I would not do for you, if you ask me like that. I swear to you that—"

"Gently, my dear Major," she interrupted, laying her hand lightly on his arm; "don't swear; it is—not good form. Do what I bid you, but pray don't protest so much."

"Sibyl," he whispered, in a sudden access of courage and passion, "when will you hear me? When will you give me the chance of telling you how I long to live at your command, how I wish for—"


"Dinner," announced the butler, solemnly. And the poor Major had to hurry off to conduct his hostess into the dining-room. The revulsion of feeling was terrible, and Gabriel found great difficulty in regaining even apparent composure. Never before had Sibyl given him so much encouragement by her tone and manner. It was hard, almost unendurable, that, when courage and the



opportunity had come to him at the same moment, his attempt to declare himself had been so cruelly thwarted.

Sibyl, thoroughly satisfied with the result of her manœuvring, now gave herself up to the bent of her own inclination, feeling that she could do so without detriment to any future plans. She knew that for the time being she could devote herself to entertaining Claud, without incurring furious glances and angry interruptions from jealous Gabriel; nor had she forgotten Carlton in her calculations. It would be well to take this opportunity of making him feel that she could find quite as much entertainment in the conversation of other men as he had hitherto alone thought himself able to give her. To-day she absolutely ignored his presence, giving her entire attention to Morel, for whom she kept her words and smiles. Looks she never openly bestowed on any, even the most favoured of her friends.

Claud, for many reasons very ill at ease when first he found himself under Carlton's roof, thawed after a while, led



on by every encouragement Sibyl so well knew how to give him ; and when he had got over his nervousness, talked pleasantly on whatever subject she chose to suggest. Her social tact and talent were great, and she could readily adapt herself to the bent of the mind of another, more especially if it was her real wish to please the man on whom she was bestowing time and attention. With Morel a totally different line must be taken from that which suited Carlton. Social topics, *on dits*, and dubious scandal were entirely eschewed to-day. A fair field was opened by an opportune remark on "India," a topic evidently interesting to Claud's inquiring mind, and on which Sibyl was well able to give him much information. She had lived among the natives, and had also much experience of the genus Anglo-Indian, having followed her father, an army-surgeon, through many vicissitudes and several regiments.

Mr. Carlton, though at home, was by no means so well entertained as his guest Morel. The "local" lady, who sat by her host's side, had a hobby, which not

only engrossed her entirely, but from which she never got away if once she had managed to direct the conversation in its wake. Poultry generally, the proper food for hens, and the economy of a certain system of rearing chickens formed the staple of her incessant remarks and questions with which Carlton found himself overwhelmed on this occasion. If he could have sat in unresponsive silence, allowing his thoughts to wander with the ceaseless flow of talk with which the lady on his left entertained Morel, his task would not have been so hard; but the hobby was ridden by a peremptory spinster, who declined to be ignored, and would not be satisfied with any divided attention.

McKenzie, as we know, had received his instructions from his charmer, and really exerted himself to obey them to the letter. His task was not an easy one, for he was not a man likely, under any circumstances, to find favour in the opinion of a sweet, single-hearted, unworldly woman like Pearl. His every word and movement jarred upon her; and the more

he strove to please her, the more she wondered how it was possible for Hubert, his mother, or Miss Moreton to tolerate so obnoxious and vulgar a person—nay more, to call him “friend.” Gabriel racked his brains for subjects likely to amuse his gentle little hostess, and she listened to him with the greatest politeness. That was the extent of her social power. To respond, or feign any interest in the subjects selected by the Major for her entertainment was impossible to Mrs. Carlton, despite her wish to fulfil the novel duties of hostess successfully. Apart from the unattractiveness of McKenzie and his stories, Pearl was preoccupied by other anxieties—some of a very humble nature, regarding the viands and the waiting, and others as to her husband’s comfort. She speedily perceived and fretted over the weary look upon his face, a face she always watched with loving solicitude, and the slightest change on which she instantly noticed, as now that its gloom was apparent.

Perhaps the only two persons really at their ease in that cosy dining-room were

Sibyl and the "local" lady, as their placidity was utterly unruffled by any thought as to the comfort or well-being of the others present.

The night was soft and balmy. A south wind "blowing fluffy feathers," as Dora said, met the faces of the three ladies, who walked out through the open French windows and along the garden-paths. Presently the gentlemen, lit up by glowworm sparks and heralded by fragrant clouds of tobacco-smoke, joined these fair wanderers. Sibyl, who had expected, was the first to perceive them, and by an adroit flank movement met Morel, and walked away with him along a narrow path, leaving the other four to promenade the broad gravel sweep "in line." Dora had been as prompt as Sibyl in taking possession of "dear Mr. Morel," and to his hand the child now clung, with a renewal of the affection she had always shown to the genial artist in the old Hamburg days. The path chosen by Sibyl being narrow for three, Claud seated the little girl on his arm, who voluntarily

kissed his temples and his soft waving hair.

“My little darling!” he whispered.


Sibyl heard, and clenched her long white fingers. She had never encouraged the signs of affection Dora had bestowed on her; but from this evening, and for some time to come, she repulsed the timid little maiden on every possible occasion.

After walking some few yards in silence,

“I think Mrs. Carlton called you, Dora,” said Sibyl; on which the child at once ran back towards the house. Pearl had not called Dora, but she clasped the little hand gladly and held it fast, grateful for silent sympathy among her uncongenial companions; for poor Pearl had been left to wander to and fro with her guests, while Carlton muttering some excuse, had gone away to avoid the Major and—more chickens.

Having got rid of Dora, and with her of the feeling of irritation the child's presence had caused, Sibyl in her gentlest tone addressed Morel.

“I purposely led you away from the others,” she said, “because I wish to plead with you on dear Mrs. Carlton’s behalf. She is so talented, so persevering, and yet so modest, that I fear you hardly understand her. You can do her inestimable service by coming here frequently and helping her in a thousand little straits and difficulties that none can understand so well as yourself. She fears to trouble you or interrupt your more important work. I, loving her—as who could help who really knows her sweet nature?—do not fear I am asking too much of you in begging you to come and see her, to advise and help her. Her marriage—I know I can trust you—is the great mistake of her life. *You* will understand me; others not doing so might attempt to silence or reprove me. You will feel for and with me, as her intimate friend. Her husband is amiable, pleasant, *comme il faut*, but absolutely unable to appreciate or, indeed, to understand her. As yet she has not dreamt of this inability on his part. To her he is still the one great and good man on this earth. Long



may the delusion last! I foster it in every way because that is for her happiness. You can do your share towards adding to it also by keeping her mind occupied with the work she is fond of. Dear Mr. Morel, I have spoken frankly; it is for Pearl's sake, the sake of the dear simple trusting child-woman, whom we surely would *both* save from pain, trouble, or harm. Am I presuming on your good-nature, or will you give me your help?"

Before these two so differently interested friends of Mrs. Carlton's rejoined her, Sibyl had obtained the definite promise she had determined to get from Claud. He had pledged himself to come to Fern-Lea on Saturday between two and three, to see the studio and volunteer to give Mrs. Carlton regular lessons, if she would permit him to do so.

"I shall tell no one about our little plan. Your visit must be unexpected, of course," said Miss Moreton. "Whatever occurs, be sure your journey down will not be in vain. I shall certainly be at home to receive you."





## CHAPTER XIX.

“SOLD.”

“**I** HAVE called upon you, dear Mrs. Moreton,” said Lady Carlton, in her most affable manner, “in the first place to bid you good-bye before leaving Hastings, and also to tell you how thoroughly satisfied I am with the accounts I have just received of your daughter’s beneficial influence on Mrs. Hubert Carlton.”

“I am indeed charmed to see you, under any circumstances,” replied Mrs. Moreton, evidently gratified by the unexpected honour of this visit, though fully aware that its real purport had by

no means been revealed to her as yet. "Are you leaving Hastings for any time, Lady Caroline?"

"Yes, I am actually going to London for the rest of the season. The fact is poor Lady Basilisk, who, as we know, is no longer as young as she once was, has begged me to join her in town, and to share the responsibilities her position involves. She has just settled herself now in Park-lane. Together we can fulfil the duties society imposes upon us, and even receive *chez nous* without too much fatigue to either of us."

"I suppose you will now allow Mrs. Hubert to call upon you?"

"Yes; that must be. Divided families are not *comme il faut*. It is always considered *bourgeois* to give the world occasion to discuss one's private affairs. You have elected to become my son's confidante and already know more of his wife than I do, or am ever likely to learn. Therefore I speak to you on this painful subject without hesitation."

"I consider myself flattered by your confidence, Lady Caroline, and if my

daughter or I can in any way be of service to you—”

“By the bye,” interrupted her Ladyship, “when is this marriage of your daughter’s to be settled? Gabriel McKenzie is in every sense eligible, and I would advise you to caution Miss Sibyl not to play fast and loose any longer with so brilliant a *parti*. He will inherit an enormous fortune one of these days, and has already the command of more money than any other young man of my acquaintance.”

“I think you said you had just heard from Major McKenzie, Lady Caroline?” said the widow. “Will you forgive my apparent indiscretion in asking you if it was he who commented on my Sibyl’s influence on your daughter-in-law?” Lady Caroline winced as she always did when that unwelcome tie was alluded to. Mrs. Moreton paused for a moment before she added deprecatingly, “You can hardly wonder at my being very anxious as to the opinions others form of my child, deeply concerned as I am for her lasting happiness.”

“If you expect to secure that by

marrying her to Gabriel, you and she have at present every reason to be satisfied. Only, as I said before, bid your daughter accept him, and soon. He has been kept at a distance too long already; he has written to me to complain about it, and to ask for my advice."

"Which you have given him?" Mrs. Moreton's dark eyes looked searchingly into her visitor's face as she asked this question.

"Which I shall give him, and in emphatic terms, now that I have cautioned you," answered Lady Caroline decisively.

"And may I inquire—"

"What it will be?" said her Ladyship promptly. "Most certainly. You shall be explicitly answered too. If Gabriel cannot obtain a direct reply to a straightforward proposal, I shall advise him to give up Miss Sibyl and all intentions regarding her. He is infatuated at present; but he is not the sort of man to bear being openly trifled with, if once made aware that such is the fact. Lady Basilisk's niece or Mrs. Winter's sisters, the daughters of that Colonel Marsden

whom you met at my house, are all more eligible, from a social point of view, than Miss Moreton. You will excuse my frankness, I hope? The girls, I know, though young and pretty, are quite old enough to appreciate the advantages of being allied to Major McKenzie."

"I thought Colonel Marsden's girls were still in the school-room?" suggested Mrs. Moreton.

"So much the better for Gabriel. Finding himself ill-used by a woman of the world like your daughter, an inexperienced schoolgirl will have the attraction of novelty for him. Such an one would be able to console him for Miss Sibyl's cruelty."

"But she has not been cruel," said the mother anxiously.

"As yet, no. By the bye, Mrs. Moreton, I think you have some desire to receive the Marsden girls as pupils, have you not? The Colonel asked my advice on the subject the other day."

The last statement the widow felt sure was not accurate; she had so far drilled Colonel Marsden to trust in her that she

firmly believed he would prefer her opinion and advice to whatever Lady Caroline might have to say. Still, he had evidently been *talking*, and that Mrs. Moreton disapproved of, as he should be very distinctly informed when next he came to her for one of their now customary confidential chats. Meanwhile, by no faintest indication, should Lady Caroline perceive that her word or influence were doubted.

With a bland smile and in a half-pleading voice the widow resumed the thread of conversation that had dropped into silence for a moment.

“I certainly had great hopes,” she said, “of being able to benefit the Misses Marsden by so preparing them for their onerous duties in society; but I am perfectly aware, Lady Caroline, that if you disapprove—” and to prove her inability to cope with her visitor, Mrs. Moreton held up her hands deprecatingly.

Smiling and mollified, her Ladyship answered,

“I know I have great influence on all my friends, and am not surprised a woman

of your sense should have discovered the fact. Now, Mrs. Moreton, let us thoroughly understand one another. If you can induce your daughter to accept my *protégé*, I will undertake to get the Colonel's girls for you. Do you accept my offer? It is made in confidence, and in perfect good faith, of course."

"Indeed, no effort on my part shall be wanting to further Sibyl's acceptance of the Major's suit. That I solemnly promise you, Lady Caroline." So said Mrs. Moreton.

\* \* \* \* \*

The immediate result of this interview was a telegram from Lady Caroline to Major McKenzie, which ran thus:

"Wish to see you on business of utmost importance to yourself and S.M. Come down to-morrow without fail."

Gabriel came—"on the wings of love," as he playfully suggested to Lady Caroline.

Luncheon over and the servants dismissed, the avowed subject of the interview was at once mooted by her Ladyship. After listening to Gabriel's account of Sibyl's unusual encouragement to him on

the occasion of the dinner at Fern-Lea Lady Caroline spoke :

“ There is an almost insuperable obstacle to the girl’s giving her consent,” said she mysteriously. “ That is why you have not even been allowed to propose hitherto.”

“ But I have just told you, on Thursday before dinner, I almost—”

“ Yes, yes; you *almost* proposed, and you would have been *quite* refused, believe me. I am working in your interest, Gabriel, and I have taken the trouble thoroughly to acquaint myself with the facts as they stand. I was with Mrs. Moreton an hour yesterday, entirely on your account, and there is an obstacle—”

“ So you said before, Lady C,” interrupted McKenzie. “ Now, by the Lord Harry, I have never yet found the obstacle money can’t remove. Is this a matter of fifty pounds or so ?”

“ It is a matter of five hundred pounds,” said Lady Caroline; but she avoided meeting his keenly inquisitive glance.

“ Five hundred pounds to be paid to *you* ?” cried he.



“To me in trust for another, in whose hand all power lies.”

“Oh!” was all the Major replied; but presently gave further vent to his feelings by a prolonged whistle.

“I have a great mind to ask the girl herself, without bribing anybody,” was the result of some reflection on his part.

“By all means try to win her; but do not speak to me of bribery. You utterly misunderstand the position of affairs; and you may take my word for it that, unless properly secured in the way, I have mentioned to you, your suit will fail.”

“That may be. Still I shall then know what I am about. In the other case, suppose I hand the five hundred pounds over to you, who gives me any guarantee that I shall really receive my money’s worth?”

Lady Caroline toyed somewhat nervously with the *châtelaine* that hung at her side, and with her eyes fixed on the golden baubles, replied,

“Give me the money, Gabriel, and I think I can promise—”

“You *think* you can!” cried he, jump-



ing up and beginning to pace the room with hurried steps. "No, no, Lady C.; that is asking a little too much. Five hundred is a pretty good sum to risk on a third person's opinion. Why, have you realised that a tidy little lot of money like that would nearly cover your town expenses if you are going in for a joint establishment with old Basilisk?"

Lady Caroline winced, as though from a threatened blow.

"My only wish was to befriend you, Gabriel," she said, impressively. "Of that you must be thoroughly aware. I desired to do my utmost to bring about the fulfilment of your wishes. Without my intervention, and the money Mrs. Moreton is in immediate need of—" she stopped suddenly, looked at him, saw that the name had been noted, and in a changed tone continued hurriedly, "alas, now I have betrayed her, poor lady! That I certainly had neither desire nor authority to do. Let this interview end, Gabriel; I feel you have cruelly misjudged me. I believed you were bent on this marriage, and wished to assist you. Now I fear you

will consider that I have brought you from town on false pretences. I thought I saw my way to securing your happiness; *your* views apparently are changed. I do not think this interview need be prolonged." She rose, and extending her hand in her stately manner, added, "Good-bye."

"Oh, come now, Lady Caroline, don't be huffy. I didn't mean to vex you, really. It was all rather sudden, and I must think it over by myself. You'll grant a fellow breathing time, won't you? May I come back in an hour and tell you my decision?"

Her face brightened a little as she replied,

"Of course, my dear Gabriel. You must be quite aware that my door can never be closed to your father's son."

But no sooner had the gentleman so described left the house than Lady Caroline's face fell, and her heart not much given to emotional palpitations, seemed to beat with a deafening sound, causing her pulses also to throb wildly.

Did he suspect her? Was he going to ask Mrs. Moreton the truth of this want

of money? Did he doubt her honesty? Would that be possible? were the thoughts in her mind as she hastily summoned her maid, and bid her follow Major McKenzie.

“Do not trouble him with questions,” she said, “or he will return himself. I only wish to know at what hotel he is staying and quite forgot to inquire.”

The maid went and reflected on her way.

“She can’t be jealous, sure-ly, and of such a nigger-looking chap as that. There’s some other game on, and money is in it somehow!” such was the conclusion Miss Smythe came to. But when she returned with her report, and saw the blank change that came into her mistress’s pale face as she listened to the news, Smythe’s opinion veered round to her first suspicion again, and she concluded her ladyship was actually in love.

“I watched the Major from just beyond the library, milady,” said Smythe confidentially. “I never lost sight of him till he entered the door of Glenville House. He stayed there best part of an hour. He never went near no hotel; but when he came out he just hurried to the

station, and I saw him take his place in the London express." So, with an unctuous voice stated the abigail; and Lady Caroline, her hand on her failing heart, said, "Thank you, Smythe, that will do; you may go." On which Smythe withdrew, with the conviction that "there's no fool like an old fool."

Later in the day, Jane the demure brought a note for Lady Caroline from Mrs. Moreton.

"I am to wait for an answer, if you please," said Jane, smiling and blushing, as he of the plush and powder complimented her on her "purty looks."

The note, carefully sealed, was eagerly opened by her ladyship.

"You can come back for the reply presently," she said, anxious to avoid the man's possible scrutiny as she read. The writing was disguised, and ran as follows:

"The offer of five hundred pounds, kindly arranged by you, was fortunately at once appreciated, and acted upon by me with due discretion. So no one is compromised; but you ran a great risk. Fortunately for you, I am not easily at a



loss. I now hold a conditional IOU for the amount, and quite expect payment *will be due* within a week. Appreciating the value of your 'happy thought' in starting this matter, I now offer you half the sum named, on condition that Colonel M. agrees to send his daughters to the place named yesterday. If you say *No reply*, I shall understand that 'silence gives consent.' In this matter you will find it to your advantage to play into my hands, as I certainly hold the trump-card, which, for the sake of euphony, we will call Queen Sibyl."

When the servant returned for the answer, no letter had been written. Lady Caroline was standing by the window. She bent her head over the ferns growing there, as she answered the man in a surprised tone,

"Reply! Oh, I remember now! Tell the messenger there is *no reply*."

"Her ladyship had evidently forgotten all about your letter, Miss," said Jeames to Jane. "She was busying herself with plucking dead leaves off of her plants what's a-growing in her windows."

“Lor, ’ow I would give anythink almost to see her ladyship’s own rooms!” said Jane.

“If you’re out next Sunday, you shall ’ave a peep, Miss,” said Jeames kindly. “You try and look in at church-time. We’re goin’ up to town middle of next week, and a good job too. This is a — slow place for any one as is used to Lunnon life.”

“Lor, wouldn’t I like to be goin’ to Lunnon too!” said Jane enviously, and waited for Jeames’s reply, when a double knock fell upon their startled ears as they stood in the hall close together. Jane immediately sat down again upon the wooden bench; but the moment Colonel Marsden had been admitted, she slipped out of the still open door, and returned to Glenville House and her duties there, filled with new and ambitious hopes.

Into Lady Caroline’s mind care had crept blackly. The horrible feeling of being *found out* to a woman of her haughty temperament was the deepest degradation. To lie and plot and scheme for the sake of some hundred pounds was neither low

nor vile ; but to be caught in the very act was terribly bitter, and filled her with shame and remorse. Mrs. Moreton assured her in that guarded letter that she had not exposed Lady Caroline's duplicity to Gabriel ; but who could trust Mrs. Moreton ? And if the Major did not *know* of her deceit, yet he had certainly suspected her, and had gone to Glenville House to try her case, and then left it in the care and at the mercy of that plebeian adventuress, the mother of such a girl as Sibyl, whom Lady Caroline, had, nevertheless, been quite ready to sell at her own price.







## CHAPTER XX.

### BLANDISHMENTS.

**I**N the Saturday following the dinner party at Fern-Lea, had turned out so satisfactory to Sibyl, there was some discussion over the breakfast table as to the manner in which the afternoon should be spent. Friday had been wet and gloomy, and the smiling sunshine next morning looked the more inviting. Hubert was decidedly in favour of some joint enterprise.

“It is absurd for you to send me on a riding expedition, Miss More said he, “while you, our guest, are alone at home. Why should we not

go up to town, drive in the Park, dine at Blanchard's and go to the theatre."

"What a tempting programme," cried Pearl.

"Very." Sibyl admitted; "and I am really sorry to desire to postpone it, more especially as I am bound to admit that my wish in this matter is a purely selfish one. To tell you the truth, Mr. Carlton, I am getting impatient to ride Brown Beauty myself, and if your kind wife will not mind giving her a tiring gallop to-day, and an hour's preparatory canter on Monday morning, I promise to venture to make my first attempt that afternoon."

Carlton would still have preferred to have his own way and Miss Moreton's company, but she, having the stronger will, carried her point. She was particularly amiable all the morning; went into the stables with her host, arranged the freshly cut flowers in the drawing-room and for the dining-table, and even walked into "the town" with Carlton to purchase fruits for dessert.

"You have been very assiduous about the old logs this week, Mr. Carlton," she

said, while they were out together. "This is the first day you have honoured us with your company."

"And now *you* are bent on sending me away!" he exclaimed reproachfully.

But she was not to be so easily turned from a point she intended to discuss.

"How is it you have gone to town so often?" she continued. "I am interested in your affairs, and want to know."

"Things are not going well down there," he admitted, while a gloomy frown gathered upon his brow.

"What, in the yard of wrecks?" she asked.

"The chances are I shall be wrecked myself some day, if my luck leaves me like this."

"On the contrary, things are taking a favourable turn just now, if only you would see them in the right light. That business of yours is behind the age, and unworthy of you, your talents, and your social position. Turn it over to some old fogey, who will be pleased to sit at a desk or count over the rusty nails. For yourself, realise, sell out, and invest your fortune

in a stud, or at least in two or three promising thoroughbreds. I do not quite know all the correct technical paraphernalia of sporting terms, so my advice, perhaps, sounds feminine—*ergo* silly—to your strong male understanding; still there is truth, or rather common sense, to be found below my superficial chatter.”

“Perhaps you have very little idea how deep an impression your words have already made upon me,” said he. “I have thought of little else since last we spoke together; and if only I saw my way, I would cut all the old logs, as you call them, and divert myself in endeavouring to make a fortune among more congenial surroundings.”

“Spoken like a trump!” said she. “And when I am married, which I intend to be before long, and have a settled income of my own, I mean to go shares with you in your horses and your bets; and, with my help and luck to back you, you are bound to win for us both.”

“What a wonderful woman you are!” he cried. “What pluck and spirit you

have under that quiet reserve of your's, Sibyl !”

“ Sibyl !” she repeated, surprised.

“ Yes ; Sibyl ! How can I call you Miss Anybody, knowing you, appreciating you, as I do ?”

She did not choose to notice by any change of her manner the sudden warmth of his tone, so said,

“ Has Mrs. Carlton noticed your gloomy looks this week ? She must have guessed matters were going wrong with you.”

“ Yes, poor little woman ! She is fretting about me ; she is really too anxious always where I am concerned.”

“ You do not worry her about your difficulties, I hope ? It is so unwise to distress a woman about matters out of her province.”

“ And yet *you*—”

“ Oh, Mr. Carlton, do not mistake me ! I am not in the least distressed about you. Also, bear in mind, I am much older and have far more experience of the world and—business than your wife is ever likely to acquire. *Tant mieux pour elle !*”

“ Why do you say that ? Would it not

be better for her and for me that we should understand and help one another in the bearing of such troubles as life always seems full of?"

"Now you are getting out of *my* province, Mr. Carlton. Of psychological laws I know nothing, and can offer no opinion. Accept this good advice instead, my friend: leave your wife in blissful ignorance, and so spare yourself endless questions, misgivings, surmises, entreaties, and the rest of the battery anxious and loving women bring to bear to torment their lovers and themselves with."

When the horses were brought round, Sibyl stood on the steps, patted Belshazzar's neck approvingly, admired Beauty's colour and bearing, and then walked down to the gate and watched husband and wife depart. The sun shone full upon the burnished glory of her hair, she shaded her eyes with her hand, and from under it looked away along the lane that led towards the park. Presently she drew out her watch, and with a sigh of relief glanced towards the other side of the road.

“ Only just in time, thank Heaven! But they *are* out of sight!” With this piously grateful exclamation, Sibyl suddenly bent her steps towards the house, and walked slowly on, lost in thought. So completely lost indeed, that she did not hear the gate swing to and fro, nor did she notice approaching footsteps until they paused at her side.

“ Oh! Mr. Morel, how you startled me!” she cried.

“ I am fortunate in finding you out here!” said he, “ pardon my unceremonious arrival. I have walked all the way from town.”

He really felt relieved at the moment to find Sibyl alone. Her presence did not affect or discompose him, indeed she had already taught him to feel quite at his ease when by her side.

“ You must be very tired. Come in at once and rest;” she said, with just enough of solicitude in her voice to prove her genuine anxiety on his behalf. “ Did not the walk seem very long to you—alone?”

“ No, indeed. I found a most interest-

ing companion in Father Thames. I walked by the river's side all the way, and for the first time realised the beauties it boasts of, even in the immediate vicinity of London."

They had reached the steps by this time, Sibyl paused and said,

"I fear you will be sadly disappointed to hear that Mr. and Mrs. Carlton have ridden out together! I told you I should not say you were coming. Short of that, I used every effort to detain them, but they were bent on a ride, and—probably—on exchanging those mutual cooing confidences incidental to the Spring of married life. Who can blame them? Although only a temporary guest, I constantly feel myself *de trop* here. They both long for—  
*one only*

"Friend in my retreat  
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet!"

Do you not agree with my version of the quotation Mr. Morel?"

"Admirable!" said he, scarce knowing what he did say, so much discord had her insinuations brought into his mind,



which had been harmoniously attuned by nature's beauties and pleasurable exercise, when first he entered that garden.

"Shall we take another turn?" she suggested, as he moved away from the house.

"Certainly, if you please," he answered. She glanced surreptitiously up into his face. All the pleasantness had died out of it. She saw how thoroughly he was in her power at present, and how ably she could play on the sensitive chords of his nature. She would try him still a little further, and then gradually bring his thoughts back into happier grooves.

"To resume that question of the '*solitude à deux!*'—none can feel the potency of the spell more acutely than you do, who have conveyed it all in your picture of the loves of Romeo and Juliet. Only a glimpse of that carries one back to paradise—before Eve ate of the forbidden fruit that is." She paused, but as he made no remarks she continued,

"Has it ever struck you that Eve partook of that apple, simply because she was utterly bored by the same tame-

ness of her surroundings? Languishing with a feeling of intense *ennui*, she must have been delighted at the first appearance of a talking stranger on the scene. He, of course, suggested so many unsuspected possibilities to her untaught and thoroughly feminine mind. Can you imagine any inquisitive woman, to this day, refusing so politely worded a temptation?"

"Your views are novel to me, but no doubt deserving of consideration," said he, with a faint attempt at a smile. "Will you allow me to reflect before I reply?" They had reached the gate now. "I will bid you good-bye," he said, offering her his hand. "Pray remember me respectfully to Mrs. Carlton."

"And do you really think that you will be allowed to run away like this?" she said smiling. "Why what do you suppose my hospitable little hostess would say to me, on her return?"

"Nothing that you could not readily answer," he said.

"But I am responsible for you in this instance. And shall keep you as my—must I say *unwilling*—prisoner? Come

into the house with me now, please. We will go into 'the Studio' together, and I shall set you to work on Mrs. Pearl's latest attempt. I want to hear your opinion. She has sketched my profile as "Night," with closed eyes. No, Mr. Morel, you must not attempt to escape. I am quite determined you shall stay. Come with me, at once."

She led the way, and he unwillingly followed her. It had been her wish to show Pearl's Sanctum to Morel, in its mistress's absence. Sibyl did not choose that this prettiest and most artistic spot in the whole house should be indelibly associated with Pearl in Claud's mind. She had resolved that he should first see his "Romeo" in her presence; and, also, that his hand should touch up that profile which would compel him to look at, and concentrate his vision, if not his thoughts, on her. Indeed, it was with this view she had begged Mrs. Carlton, as a special favour, to commence the sketch on the previous day, suggesting, at the same time, that she would prefer to sit with her eyes closed—as "Night."

As she entered the Sanctum, Dora, who was plaiting coloured papers into some fanciful patterns, started up, prepared to slip out of the room. The child had instinctively shrunk from Sibyl, since the latter had repulsed her. But Claud, catching sight of the frightened little maiden, at once went towards her, and lifting her tenderly in his arms, kissed the pale face repeatedly, and called her by all the endearing names that came into his mind.

“Is this where you work, darling?” he asked, “and have you learnt to play too?”

“This is my Pearl’s room, and she paints here, and we have often—often talked of you, and wished you were with us. And Pearl teaches me everything; and I have learnt a little tune, some day I will play it to you, when—when—we are alone.”

“Why not now?”

“Please don’t ask me, she doesn’t like it, she is waiting to show you her picture,” whispered the child, indicating Sibyl by a glance.


“Dora, ring the bell in my room, and

tell Frida to mend my jacket. You can remain there with her."

Frida was the Hamburg maiden, brought over specially to attend on Dora. The child was still on Morel's arm.

"I must go, she always sends me away now. Good-bye!" she whispered regretfully, gave him a kiss and left the room.

"Here is the sketch, and this is my position," said Sibyl. She placed the drawing in his hand, and went away to the cushioned chair, seating herself, and arranging the folds of her dress with deliberation. Finally, she laid her head back. He was silent so long, that, though sure he was noting her chiselled profile, she could not resist opening her eyes, and glancing across at him. He had moved a step further away, and had turned his back upon her. The sketch lay in a listless hand, for his attention was riveted on a small, delicately tinted photograph that stood on the corner of the mantel. He had utterly forgotten Sibyl and all her living attractions, and was absorbed in contemplating a paper reflex of the face of—Pearl.





## CHAPTER XXI.

### CARLTON'S NEW LEAF.

**M**R. CARLTON had talked much, and made elaborate plans for the coming race-week. He was, of course, going to the Derby with a party made up by "the men at the club." Miss Moreton made an effort to upset this arrangement, and to induce Carlton to take her, and, a necessary consequence, his wife. But finding her hints were not encouraged, indeed, scarcely acknowledged, Sibyl gracefully yielded to circumstances.

"I suppose you mean to introduce your wife to this novel form of dissipation on

the Oaks-day," she suggested, having retreated from her first attempt. And for the Oaks-day suitable preparations were made. But when the fillies' Friday dawned, there came with it such a downpour of rain that the ladies had to abandon all thoughts of out-door amusement. The sky was expected "to lift" about ten; but the sky kept its lowering threatening appearance, and sent down unceasing torrents, that flooded the roads, made lakes of the pools, and streamed along the gutters in cataracts.

"I suppose we must yield to this superior force? What can we women do when the elements oppose us?" said Pearl, looking wistfully out of the window.

"Cave in!" muttered Sibyl crossly.

"Smile, and make the best of it," answered her hostess; "and hope for sunshine next time."

"It is truly disgusting;" remarked Carlton, coming to bid the ladies good-bye. He was incased in waterproof, and quite ready to make the best of circumstances even to the leaving his ladies at home. He was in excellent spirits himself, which

no rain was likely to damp. He felt prepared to go, see, and conquer. It is to men in such moods that Fortune often comes smilingly. On the Derby-day Carlton had done very little in the way of betting, but moved by some happy thought—he called it inspiration—he backed an “outsider” for one of the principal races on the Friday. The mare, a strongly-built bay, looked every inch a four-years-old. She was possessed of extraordinary staying power, and, thanks to the rain and consequent heaviness of the ground, after a time got the lead, and kept it steadily. The favourite’s turn of speed could not avail her over soil that required special strength and endurance.

Carlton returned to Fern-Lea wonderfully elated. He had won £950.

“And I have news for you that will please you better than my good luck,” he said to Sibyl, whom he met on the stairs.

“What can that be? Nothing about McKenzie, I hope?”

“No; bother McKenzie! You are always harping on that black discordant



string. You shall hear my news by and by—when we are alone.”

“*When we are alone!*” Pearl, coming from her room at that moment, heard those words. They were said in a low tone, and yet so impressively. Her first impulse was to ask, “What is to happen ‘when we are alone?’” But a strange hesitation overcame her; she felt that *she* was not included in that “we.”

The rain that had continued throughout the day abated at dusk; and since then a fresh breeze had sprung up, that scattered the heavy black clouds and sent them adrift. The moon, pallid and somewhat one-sided in appearance, glanced down ruefully on the moist earth and shining leaves, and also on pale Sibyl, as she stood hesitating at the open window of the drawing-room. She had enveloped herself in black clouds too, of soft becoming lace.

“Do come out,” pleaded Carlton, standing on the terrace; “walk with me while I finish my cigar. You know I have much to tell you. It is beautiful now, and the ground is drying rapidly.”

Pearl, approaching the window, heard the last words.

“Do you want us to come out, Hugh?” she asked, and stepping from the window put her hand upon her husband’s arm.

“Be charitable, Pearl; play to us: it is delightful to walk about out here and listen to the music.”

His wife withdrew her hand, and silently went back into the room. The lights had not been brought in, so even little Dora could not see the passing look of pain that compressed Pearl’s lips. She went to the piano and played, as she had been bid; but it was a very mechanical performance, for her thoughts were out in the moonlit garden, whence the sound of footsteps, a light laugh, or a chance word now and again came to her eagerly listening ears.

At last her hands left their uncongenial task, and, falling into her lap, lay there closely clasped, with the unconscious movement of one subduing pain. Dora had crept to Pearl’s side long before, and resting her head against the knee of “her

darling," had, child-like, fallen fast asleep.

Meanwhile, Carlton eagerly told his news to Sibyl, who was so thoroughly able to "understand, appreciate, and advise him." To this conclusion Hubert had already come, in his own mind.

"I have commenced my new career to-day, thinking of you and your wise words all the time," he said. "I took a fancy to the bay filly, and liked her looks, long before the race. I knew her trainer, and he introduced me to the owner. No one thought her likely to win. She was put in, being stable companion to a sprightly young beauty, and ran alongside her for the first spurt. Pleased with the bay's looks, and satisfied as to her pedigree and soundness, I made a bid for her, and bought her at a reasonable figure. After the race, I could have got triple the sum back. But she is mine, and the commencement of our career is certainly promising. She is only known as a bay filly at present, but I mean to call her Sibylla; and if you will stand godmother she

is bound to answer—nay, more, to surpass—my expectations.”

\* \* \* \* \*

When the lamps were brought into the drawing-room, Pearl started up. Dora suddenly aroused, sat on the ground rubbing her eyes, which presently looked with wonder at Sibyl, who, entering the room from the garden with swift steps, went straight to her hostess with most unusual eagerness in her words and manner.

“I have such news for you,” she said, “and believe you will be delighted. Thanks to our patiently-endured disappointment this morning, and Mr. Carlton’s good fortune at the races, he has actually consented to—what do you think?”

Pearl looked beyond Sibyl, to the window. Hubert was standing there, and met his wife’s inquiring glance with a smile. She went to him, and when her eyes looked into his, she also smiled. “What is it, dearest?” she asked.

Sibyl had followed her.

“This is not fair, Mrs. Carlton,”

she said, "I must tell the news myself. I fought the arduous wordy battle and have been victorious; and mine must be the reward of telling you what you will be delighted to hear. You are to have a house in town for the whole of June, and I have agreed to stay on with you, if you will let me. I heard from Hastings this morning. Lady Caroline came to town yesterday, and is staying with Lady Basilisk in Park-lane. I have promised your husband to bring about the most amiable interviews between you and the mamma-in-law, and also to get Lady Basilisk to take you up. All this will be more feasible if we also are staying in town. You will thus be better able to accept all the invitations that will pour in upon you. And further, Mr. Carlton, as a pendant to my pretty promises, has given me his. We are to go to Ascot on the three days. Tell me now, are you not grateful and delighted, Mrs. Pearl?"

"I am glad you are pleased," Pearl said quietly, but said no more.

When she was alone with her husband

that night, she asked him if the proposed sojourn in town was definitively settled.

“Yes. Sibyl asked me very prettily about it. She felt sure it would give you pleasure, she said; and she thought this an excellent opportunity for your *début* in society. If you proceed in impressing the two old dowagers in Park-lane favourably, your position will be secured at once. As I made such a lucky hit with that bet of mine to-day, I feel justified in giving you this treat, little woman, and am sure you will thoroughly enjoy an initiatory glimpse at the crush and rush of the season.”

“Hugh, you are so kind, so considerate, it seems almost ungrateful to tell you that, a thousand times rather than go to London, I would stay in our own dear peaceful home. Cannot this be?”

“My Pearl, you don't know what you are talking about. You have not the least idea of what a London season means, or of the amusement you, a novice, will find in it. Your reluctance to plunge into the vortex of society is natural and pretty; but it will be prettier still to see

you enjoying yourself, as you cannot fail to do."

"I really begin to think I shall, dear, because you are looking so much brighter and happier, Hugh, than you have done all this past week. Tell me, have your workmen listened to reason? Are things going better? Is poor old Stock happier in his mind?"

"Old Stock will probably go out of his mind one of these days, Pearl. What do you think I have settled?"

"Not to turn the men away, Hugh? With a little patience and kindness they will all—"

"No, Pearl. I do not mean to turn away any one but myself. I have determined to get rid of the whole affair, to sell it all off, to realise every halfpenny, to pay my mother a lump-sum down for her interest in the concern, which she can then invest as may seem most profitable to herself. And I have resolved to give all my time, attention, and such capital as may be required, to a very different line of business and—money-getting. I made my first purchase with that view to-day.



I bought the bay filly I told you of. I mean to try my luck at racing with her, and hope to find a few others as good or better perhaps. Since I have come to this conclusion, I feel like a new man, Pearl; full of courage, spirit and enterprise. Those old logs were sickening me. Well, have you nothing to say to me?"

"It is so very sudden, Hugh, and such a complete change. If you had in the least prepared me for it! But I so admired you among your men, and the interest and knowledge you had of all the details of that queer old place. How happy we were that day, Hugh!"

"Happy! We are always going to be happy; and when I have fairly started on my new career, you shall see—"

"Hugh," she interrupted anxiously, "you are not acting only upon your own responsibility in this matter, are you? What will your mother say to it? She may disapprove entirely. You surely will consult her before you take any decisive step; will you not?"

"Possibly I may tell her of my inten-



tions; but she cannot influence me in the least."

"Won't you talk it over with Mr. Walton, dear? He is so clever and so thorough about all business-matters. I cannot feel that it is right for you to set at naught the hard work of so many years. I do not understand it quite, but I feel that you are running a risk to your own content and to your peace of mind. Talk to Mr. Walton, Hugh; he is honest and true."

"Goosey, you speak like a dear good child, but you do not comprehend my position in the least. I know I must take up new ground in defiance of every recognised prejudice, and fly in the face of all sober-minded people. That I am prepared for, and am, fortunately, my own master. No one can compel me; and I must not have you cavilling either, little wife. Surely you are willing to share my ventures, and let us climb the path that leads to racing fame together."

Was it likely she would attempt to coerce or discomfit him by worldly-wise cautions she had neither learnt herself as

yet, nor even understood the necessity of? Of course Hugh must know; whatever *he* decided *she* would teach herself to think was for the best.

She laid her arms about his neck, and kissing his lips, said, with a tender smile,  
“Excelsior!”

“Bravo, Pearl!” cried he, delighted. Her wise and cautious words had involuntarily filled him with misgiving, which he now dismissed as readily as she had done. “Excelsior shall be the name of the first promising colt I invest in, unless we are forestalled, which we can ascertain from the *Racing Calendar*.”





## CHAPTER XXII.

### ANOTHER LEGAL TENTATIVE.

**I**N the morning following the above conversation, Mr. Walton unexpectedly made his appearance at Fern-Lea.

“I have come to tell you astonishing news, Pearl,” he said, when he found himself alone with his ward. “I have suddenly resolved to make a long sea-voyage, and for two reasons. You shall hear the sanitary one first. Ever since I spent that fortnight in bitter cold Hamburg, the bronchial affection that has at times made my life a weariness to me is so much increased that I have sought a

fresh medical opinion ; and the physician suggested rest of mind and a long sea-voyage. Now it so happens that a case of the utmost importance has lately come into our hands, a case involving nearly a million of money to our clients—an influential company. To sift the matter some legal envoy must go out, and I have offered to undertake the duties of investigation myself. In a week I start for Melbourne.”

Pearl was both astonished and grieved at this unexpected news ; and when, after further conversation, she realised that she would have to lose this trusted friend and counsellor for an indefinitely long time, a powerful impulse possessed her to tell him of her husband’s suddenly-formed plans, and to ask Mr. Walton for his honest opinion as to Hubert’s intended line of action. But Pearl’s sense of obedience was stronger even than her desire for her old friend’s advice in what appeared to her a most perplexing crisis of her husband’s career. *He* had bidden her keep silence on this matter, and to obey him was her first duty.

“We are going up to town for a month,” she told Mr. Walton, “and you must come to us there to see Hubert and bid him good-bye. Promise me that, dear Guardie, because I particularly wish you to meet my husband before you go so far—Oh, so dreadfully far!—away from us all.”

The lawyer promised, and went his way sorrowfully. His heart was heavy at the thought of leaving Pearl, and his trouble had been much increased by the fact of his finding that “down-looking Miss Moreton” established and evidently quite at home in Fern-Lea.

From the day that Pearl read him that letter of her husband’s, in which the Moreton’s were spoken of as “trusted friends,” Mr. Walton had occupied himself in making inquiries into the antecedents of the ladies of Glenville House. He had already learnt much that was unfavourable in regard to Sibyl’s and Rhoda’s garrison flirtations in India. He had carefully traced their arrival in England, after getting due information of a somewhat scandalous intrigue carried

on by one of the young ladies with a certain captain of the 300th on board the P. and O. that brought them to England. He had further ascertained that Rhoda, the younger of the girls, had been married to the Lisbon wine-merchant at the church in Belsize Park, in which quasi-select neighbourhood Mrs. Moreton had found "genteel" lodgings. And having learnt all this, Mr. Walton was further exerting himself to discover the why and wherefore of Miss Sibyl's disappearance from under her mother's roof, shortly after that edifying marriage ceremony of her sister's.

So far, with unceasing perseverance, had Mr. Walton followed the career of the "Belgravian adventuresses." He had even traced Mrs. Moreton to her late establishment in Brussels. But the motive for that mysterious and protracted disappearance of Sibyl's was still unfathomed. And now all these inquiries would have to be abandoned, and whatever warning there might have been in Sibyl's past career must remain unrevealed, because it was at present vague and undefined.

When it occurred to Mr. Walton to

secure two remunerative pupils for Mrs. Moreton, he felt that he could thus establish a certain hold upon that lady, by which he hoped, if need were, to some extent to control the movements of Sibyl, if such control might be necessary, for the sake of his guileless young ward, Pearl. The old lawyer—for a lawyer—was an exceptionally conscientious man, and one who observed and strove to follow a high moral standard. He had long and wearily weighed his duty to one client (the uncle of Mrs. Moreton's new pupils) against his desire to serve young Mrs. Carlton, whose husband he began to fear had already fallen, if not into the hands of the Philistines, at all events into the toils of a modern Delilah.

The inquiries Mr. Walton made, as to the actual teaching and bodily welfare of the girls placed under Mrs. Moreton's care, were eminently satisfactory, of that the lawyer had assured himself before he made his final move in the matter of the Misses Tennyson. And if the "morale" of the lady principal and her daughter were not of the highest, it was hardly likely that

paying pupils would suffer or be neglected on that account. Mrs. Moreton was far too clever a manager in all arrangements that concerned *business*, to give her patrons a chance of complaint. With such specious arguments did honest Mr. Walton try to lull his conscience. He had resolved on making this move (into what from that time forth he called the enemy's camp) on the Sunday on which Dora had volunteered her information about Mr. Morel. It was on that day he also learnt that Carlton had concealed his first meeting with "the adventuresses" in Brussels. This seemed to the lawyer a most suspicious fact; as it would be sure to appear to a man whose profession it was to sift human motives, and to account for human actions, and who had found that in nine cases out of ten the lever was either one of sordid self-interest, or the desire to outwit some offending fellow creature. Mr. Walton was at once possessed by fear as to Carlton's future welfare. No doubt, argued the lawyer, those wily women had kept up a constant intercourse with Carlton since that first



meeting. Such would be to their interest, of course. To know a rich young man in a good position, and acquire a decisive influence over him, could only be useful and agreeable to ladies placed as were the widow and her daughter. Mr. Walton in no sense doubted Carlton's honesty of purpose, or his affection for his wife, but the older man had learnt enough of the character of his junior to be aware that vanity and indolence formed leading traits in it. These foibles the keen-eyed widow, no doubt, had perceived and turned to account from the first, while Hubert's want of age and experience would assist either Sybil or her mother in gaining any ascendancy they might desire, over him. "And the weakest must go to the wall." Thus Mr. Walton summed up his perplexing thoughts, and wondered what chance any young man would have against the iron will of two such women as the Moretons. Having made himself thoroughly unhappy with these anticipations of some undefined evil, the lawyer suddenly veered round in his thoughts, and laughed at his folly. Why should his dear

ward's peace be imperilled? How could her possible unhappiness serve Sybil? Would it not rather be to that lady's benefit to secure so pleasant a resort for herself, as she now was evidently proving Fern-Lea to be. If only this designing woman could be married to a rich, exacting husband, whose money would act as a curb on her, then neither Carlton or his house would be of further use to her! This train of thought brought a recollection into Mr. Walton's mind. On the night of the ball at Lady Basilisk's, at which he had played the part of amused spectator, Mrs. Moreton had, confidentially, asked for certain information as to the real position and immediate prospects of Major McKenzie. The lawyer had made a note of the inquiry, and obtained reliable and most satisfactory replies as to the monetary status of the West Indian Major. This information had not as yet been communicated to Mrs. Moreton. To do so, at once, was the lawyer's intention, and in spite of urgent business transactions, which should have rendered his presence in London a *sine quâ non* during

these last hurried days, he put all personal considerations aside, and—on the plea of a farewell visit to his client's nieces—travelled down to Hastings the morning after his interview with Pearl.





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

**W**HEN Mr. Walton had left Fern-Lea in that state of mental disquietude that drove him to much reflection and immediate action, Sibyl came into her hostess' room saying,

“I suppose you are really too busy to go up to town with me?”

“To town? oh! I must beg you to excuse me. Mr. Walton, as you know, has been with me all the morning, and as Hubert thinks there is a chance of his getting a house or rooms to-day, we may have to go to-morrow. There are

many things to see to here first. Did you not know that he purposed our leaving so soon?"

"No! really? How very considerate your husband is to you. You have only to express the slightest wish, and he hastens to fulfil it."

"This time he has certainly anticipated my desires," said Pearl smiling, "for I had not thought of going so soon at all."

"I gladly plead guilty to having suggested what I believed would prove for your good and your enjoyment. The latter—*va sans dire!* As to the former, knowing you as I now do, I feel quite sure that it is desirable for you and Lady Caroline to meet, and the sooner, the better. To facilitate matters I intend to go to town to-day; and visit Lady Graän and your implacable mamma-in-law. Also, I intend to go to the studio, and give Mr. Morel a first sitting. I think I told you that he considered that profile sketch you began, a happy thought."

"That did not justify him in carrying it away," said Pearl in a tone that for her was severe.

“But I gave it to him,” suggested Sibyl. “You cannot mean to tell me that you are vexed with Mr. Morel for the liberty I took, and for which I thought I had sufficiently apologized?”

“Perhaps my displeasure was not merited by either you or Mr. Morel,” said Pearl in her usual gentle tone, to which vexation or complaint were truly alien. “At all events if you find him, give him my kind regards and tell him he is very welcome to my first attempt at sketching your fascinating face.”

“Fascinating? Are you chaffing Mrs. Pearl?”

“I was never more serious. It is a face that haunts me, and gives me more to ponder over than any I have ever seen; in that sense it fascinates me!”

“Do you know you are quite complimentary!”

“If truth deserves so flattering an adjective, I plead guilty. Will you drive to town, Miss Moreton?”

“Mr. Carlton kindly ordered the carriage for me this morning and I have heard the horses go round.”

“*Bon voyage*,” said Mrs. Carlton,  
“and *au revoir*.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Dear Sibyl Moreton!” was received with the utmost *empressement* by Lady Basilisk; and Lady Caroline herself seemed pleased to listen to all the tales Miss Sibyl had to tell of Fern-Lea, and asked a leading question now and again, to which she received telling replies. It was agreed during this interview that a reception should be given by the ladies in Park-lane, at which Mrs. Hubert Carlton should be presented to “The World.”

“She shall have that one chance,” said Lady Caroline, “and it rests with her to make a good use of her opportunities. In the meantime, my dear Miss Moreton, let me beg of you to take this tender young fledgling under your wing; I would also ask you to present her to Lady Graän and myself, as soon as may be convenient—will you do this?”

“Poor little woman how her heart will beat,” said Sibyl smiling, “she certainly holds you in *multo terrorem*, Lady

Caroline, and I hope you will deal leniently with her!"

From Park-lane Miss Moreton had herself driven to Lime-walk.

"Are you alone?" Morel asked, when he opened the studio door. Disappointment was noticeable in face and voice; but that Sibyl was prepared for and did not resent.

"I have such good news for you, that you will forgive my troubling you, although as you remark I am—'all alone.' Mr. Carlton means to take a house in town, we are coming to live perhaps within a mile of your studio, and you can give Mrs. Carlton lessons; and, further, I have a special invitation for you to come to Ascot with us, on any one of the three days that suits you best. Tuesday is sporting, Wednesday select, Thursday exciting, crowded, and dressy, in the extreme. You may take your choice. Don't say *no*, because you are most certainly going, so hold your peace and settle the day at your leisure. Now for the sketch. Have you done anything to it?"



“Not touched it! What did Mrs. Carlton say to my carrying it off? she must have been annoyed, I am sure.”

“She was delighted, and felt proud that you should consider her work worth using. Shall I put myself into position, and will you kindly bear in mind that I *have* done so to-day, instead of forgetting my existence and allowing your thoughts to wander miles away again?” She smiled, and seated herself in the velvet chair he placed for her, laying her head back in a pose of absolute rest.

“But why hide your eyes?” said he, having watched her critically.

“I do not choose to show them; and though willing to be your model and obedient slave in all else for the next hour or more, decline absolutely to look up.”

“Then the head is to be that of the Sleeping Beauty?” he asked, a little perplexed by her declaration.

“No; too conventional. Call it Luna. You know all about moonshine, as you have proved in the Romeo picture. Surround me with darkness, and let a sort of lime-light glory fall upon my face. Its

whiteness will lend itself well to such a blanching ordeal, and the picture must make a sensation. I want you to learn to think of me, and to feel *grateful* towards me, if nothing more, in future. That I shall secure by inducing you to paint a subject that will set all London talking next season."

"You certainly are—" he began, in his amazement.

"A most extraordinary woman?" suggested she. "And a most self-possessed and vanitous and conceited one? If you think so, we differ. The peculiar attractions I possess, I do not choose to deny, nor would I dream of ignoring them. *Pas si bête*. That would be affectation. Petty vices are not mine. I do not do much or feel much, in a general way. If it so happen that I exert myself, or that my passions—be they anger, revenge, hate, or love—are really aroused, then—"

"Then?" said Morel, arranging the colours on his palette.

"Then," she repeated lazily, with a little mocking laugh, "why, then, oh dear friend, do not let us attempt to dive into

such profoundly-agitated depths of futurity. Sufficient unto the day—you agree, do you not? I will add only one more word in the way of personal disquisition: believe this—*I am thorough*. If once roused, no human being could check or withstand the power of my will.”

She had risen in her momentary excitement, and going over to where he stood, laid a firm hand upon his arm as she said her last words with an intensity of expression that thrilled him. For an instant she, forgetting, raised her eyes; they met his, and he knew why they were always so scrupulously hidden. Sibyl felt that she had betrayed her secret, and without another word went back to the velvet chair.

“Luna awaits you,” she said.

And he, with commendable discretion, began his work in absolute silence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Carlton had been successful in his search for a house. He had found one comfortably situated and sufficiently well-furnished in Portugal-street, Mayfair. On the day following Miss Moreton's independant visit to London, the family

party from Fern-Lea adjourned to the town residence and took possession of it.

That same afternoon Lady Caroline—moved by curiosity, or maybe by some kindlier feeling of interest than she acknowledged even to herself—waved her prerogative, and instead of awaiting her daughter-in-law's visit, took the initiative, had herself driven to Portugal-street, and without any previous intimation of her coming, was announced to Mrs. Carlton. Pearl, busy unpacking, indeed, on her knees before a trunk as a servant brought in her ladyship's card, rose quickly, with a little flutter of dismay.

If she had but been forewarned! But there was no time for thought or delay now. In another moment she was in the drawing-room, and had received her ladyship's cool salute, and had, in her turn much moved, bent low and warmly kissed the hand of her husband's mother.

"I am very grateful to you for coming," she said, "and Hubert will be delighted."

"Where is he?" asked Lady Caroline.

"Miss Moreton has gone into the Park with him. I had to unpack and settle

things here. I am so glad now that I resolved to stay at home."

"Do you get on well with Sibyl Moreton?"

"Yes; and I think she likes staying with us."

"No doubt," said her Ladyship, with an odd smile; "she is quite able to judge where she is well off. She is a woman of considerable knowledge and experience. You must learn to make use of her. She is capable of instructing you in the ways of *our* world, and with her tact and *aplomb* can, if she chooses, open a vista of society to you. Lady Graän has taken her up; that alone would be the making of any girl. And your path, my dear, is easier still, since by your marriage you are connected with *me*. It now rests with you to hold your own. Your appearance is in your favour; and though by no means likely to take a lead in society, you may be able to play an effective minor part with some success. You will do very well for what those clever French people call an *ingénue*; or you could take the *rôle* of the rustic bride, all white silk,

simplicity, and sprigs of myrtle-blossom. Let that be the style of your dress on Tuesday week, when we will introduce you to a select number of friends in Park-lane."

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Pearl.

"It is for your good. It cannot possibly matter to me," rejoined Lady Caroline, and, as a thought struck her, continued, "I hear my son intends to take you to Ascot. You will do well to consult Sibyl Moreton as to your costume for the Cup-day. It is of the greatest importance, and may make or mar your reputation. If you dress in a sufficiently *distingué* manner to get yourself noticed and talked about, you may consider that you have made a great step in the right direction. Whereas, if you are one of, and lost among, the crowd, you lose your chance of creating a marked impression. It is a pity you are not taller; your figure is pretty, and so is your face, but the style is too *mignonne*. I am anxious to hear Lady Graan's opinion. Though *passée* herself, she has still a wonderful knowledge of what is likely to 'take' in

our set. As to dress, you cannot have a better opinion than Sibyl Moreton's, and I advise you to keep her with you as a useful model as long as she will stay. By the way, is—is anything settled about Sibyl's marriage yet?"

"I did not even know she was engaged," said Pearl, astonished.

"Ah, perhaps I was indiscreet; but I confess I am deeply interested. The gentleman is a special friend of mine. Will you do me a favour, child? Let me know by letter the moment anything is settled in this matter. You will oblige me; and more still, if you do not mention to any one, not even to Hubert, that I have spoken on this subject to you. It is evidently still to be considered as a secret, and I shall get into trouble for having betrayed it."

Lady Caroline's manner during this latter conversation was particularly impressive, indeed throughout the interview she had not shown such warmth as now animated her. Having thus spoken of Miss Moreton's intended marriage, Lady Carlton took her leave.

It would be impossible to describe the utter *bouleversement* of Pearl's feelings after her mother-in-law's departure.

Although forewarned by many chance words of Hubert's that she was unlikely to obtain either maternal sympathy or even ordinary womanly interest from Lady Caroline, Pearl in her single-heartedness had clung to the belief that her husband's mother must, in some sense, respond to the eager anxiety and affection with which she, Pearl, looked forward to meeting the only woman who stood to her in the light of a relation. Lady Carlton's anger at the marriage of her son, seemed to Pearl to prove an interest in him, which cold indifference would have caused her to doubt. And now at last they had met face to face—mother and daughter! And Pearl realised that the last woman in the world to whom she should ever turn for sympathy, counsel, or affection, was this well-dressed delicately painted fashionable lady, who evidently regarded human beings in the light of tailor's dummies, and counted it success in life to create a sensation by



a costume worn at Ascot. Pearl dreaded her husband's questions, when he should hear of this visit. She felt ashamed to meet his eyes and tell him of her bitter disappointment. Other young women would have ridiculed the arrogance and affectation of such elderly Lady Carolines, but Pearl had no laughter for subjects that touched her heart, and she quailed at the thought of showing her mortification to Hubert. He was simply delighted to find this preliminary meeting had passed off without any disagreeables, and having heard his wife state that "Lady Caroline was quite pleasant" made no further inquiries, told Pearl "she was a little trump to manage things so well," and that now all would be plain sailing for them, as they seemed to have steered clear of her Ladyship's displeasure "to start with."

It was without trepidation, but with a considerable feeling of annoyance that Sibyl next day received the unexpected information that her mother awaited her in the drawing-room in Portugal-street.

"What can have induced you to come

to town?" asked the daughter curtly, and without any other greeting.

"A matter of the greatest importance, you may be sure, Sibyl," answered the mother quietly.

"From your tone I infer that you have come up on my affairs," said Sibyl. "Must I again tell you that I absolutely decline to be interfered with at present?"

"Sibyl, be careful of yourself. You can neither offend me nor exhaust my patience; that you must know by this time, for you have already tried me very often and very sorely. I came to you to-day to bring you a warning which I dared not write. In the first place, I tell you solemnly, most solemnly, unless you accept Gabriel McKenzie's offer within a few days—a week at the outside—you lose your chance as far as he is concerned. He has made a heavy bet, and the result is pending on your decision. He is in so fractious a state of mind just now that he would as soon keep his five hundred pounds as win your acquiescence.

"Is that all you have journeyed up to

London for, mamma?" asked Sibyl, in her most contemptuous manner. "It would surely be better for you to mount guard over your pupils than over McKenzie's money. As far as I am concerned, he is quite welcome to his stake or his bet. His affairs do not concern me at present."

"It is not only on the Major's account that I have come to London," said Mrs. Moreton, as she took a slip of printed paper from her pocket-book, and handing it to her daughter, said, "read *that*, and judge for yourself."

"*That*" was the list of visitors at one of the hotels in Hastings—the names in full of those who had just arrived and of those who had just departed. Sibyl read on with a listless air until she came to the last name on the paper. Her face could scarce grow paler, but her lips blanched, and she met her mother's eyes with a look of terror in her own.

"It is quite true; I have convinced myself," said Mrs. Moreton.

There was an ominous pause, in which

the mother watched her daughter keenly. Sibyl sat motionless for some minutes. Then clenching her hand and compressing her lips, said,

“I will accept McKenzie, and at once. He will be in haste about the wedding; it shall not be delayed on my account. That is all I can do.”

“My journey has not been in vain, thank God!” exclaimed Mrs. Moreton, with pious energy; and a moment after changed her tone and bearing, as Mrs. Carlton entered the room.

With the languid utterance of one fatigued by a long journey, Mrs. Moreton met her hostess's cordial greeting and inquiries, and thanked her affectionately for the proffer of luncheon and rest. Carlton made his appearance as the gong sounded, and the party adjourned to the dining-room where little Dora stood awaiting them. Mrs. Moreton spoke affectionately to the child, who shrank from her as she did from any stranger; and the meal over, Mrs. Moreton took an opportunity of com-

menting to Mr. Carlton on the child's nervous manner and delicate looks.

"How beneficial a month at the sea would be to her poor little white face?" said the widow, in her gently-commiserating tone.

"I quite agree with you," answered Carlton. "I do not in the least approve of her being in town with us, and wish my wife would allow her to return to Hastings with you. She can come back to us when we are at Fern-Lea again, unless she has by that time learned to prefer the companionship of your pupils. What do you think, Miss Moreton?"

Miss Moreton was quite accustomed by this time to find herself appealed to for the casting vote in any plans of Carlton's, and as usual gave her decision promptly.

"Town air, or rather street suffocation, will kill the child," said she; "and I am sure she will be far better *out of the way.*"

These last words had a special meaning for Carlton, and decided the peremptory

order which he gave his wife as to sending Dora away.

In Richmond, Pearl would have refused to let the child go, and in this matter would have held her own firmly in opposition to her husband's decision. But, really believing that London life might prove injurious to her little pet, she consented to the child's departure. And this she did the more reluctantly, as Dora's companionship had become more than ever a comfort, almost a necessity to Pearl, who had spent more lonely hours since Sibyl became her guest than ever before. She would not acknowledge this fact even to herself, and had anyone presumed to state it to her, would have denied it, indignantly. And yet, even since the house in town was taken, and there was neither stable or garden for "the other two" to roam in, they were always away somewhere. Sybil was driven in Carlton's mail-phaeton, and having the horses out in that, precluded their being used in the laudau. Or, Sybil was just going round to Park-lane, and asked Mr. Carlton to "come and look after her, and

see his dear manna at the same time." Mrs. Carlton's rooms and their floral decoration gave another reason for an excursion in a hansom, for Sybil would volunteer to fetch fresh roses from Covent Garden, and Carlton, as in duty bound, accompanied her. Even the procuring of stalls at Mitchell's necessitated a joint journey, for Carlton invariably appealed to Sybil, as to "what to get, and where to go."

Pearl let them go, and held her peace, wilfully closing her eyes to what, if once acknowledged, must lead to greater troubles. Poor little wife! with all her brave struggling to ignore them, anxious doubts already haunted and perplexed her. But her honest spirit rebelled at evil-thinking, and her pride taught her to hide her pain from all eyes, and most especially from his who caused her suffering.

There were never any traces of tears on Pearl's sweet face, nor did she give herself the air of a much-enduring martyr. She was always cheerful, attended conscientiously to her household duties, and was ready at any moment for whatever

plan her husband might choose to propose. Above all, (and this was perhaps the hardest part of her self-imposed duties), Pearl never forgot that Sybil was her guest, to whom as such, consideration was due in all things.

The time might come, when Pearl would find it necessary to act on her own behalf, and rid herself of a woman whom she no longer liked, or trusted, and who seriously interfered with all her domestic arrangements. At present, Pearl chose to hold her peace; she knew well that if Hubert were suddenly, and by her act, deprived of the enjoyment of this new and congenial companionship, he would feel the change acutely, and, perhaps, resent it in some quite unforeseen fashion; whereas if Sibyl left them of her own accord, Hubert would soon learn to do without her again, and, by degrees, fall back into his former peaceful home life. That life which they had only just learned to appreciate and enjoy together! Surely it could not have utterly come to so bitter an end, and after so bright and hopeful a beginning?



Thus Pearl argued, and resigned herself to bide her time in patient cheerfulness. There might be some truth in Lady Caroline's hint of an anticipated marriage. If that were so, imaginary difficulties would be solved before they became realities. Then, all would be well. For the time being, Pearl strove to meet her husband's wishes in all respects, and believing the change would benefit Dora, consented to her going to Hastings with Mrs. Moreton.

It was during that luncheon in Portugal Street that another visitor looked in. Mr. Walton came to bid a formal farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Carlton. He was pressed for time, and it so happened that he could not get a word alone with either his host or hostess. Perhaps, wary Mrs. Moreton had given her daughter a hint that private interviews with the astute lawyer might not be desirable at present. However that might have been, the widow herself did manage to whisper a little confidential information into Mr. Walton's ear.

“ It has been finally settled this morn-

ing," said she, "that my daughter accepts Major McKenzie. And this, in great part, owing to your kindness, and the satisfactory information you brought me to Hastings."

On this Mr. Walton breathed a great sigh of relief. He felt that thus, and so far as he could foresee, his dear ward's welfare and peace seemed once again secured. And when he gave Pearl his fatherly kiss and blessing, and bade her "farewell!" he thought that now he could venture to cross the ocean with less foreboding of evil to come to her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON :

Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street. (H. & T.)





